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LOS ANGELES

ONE OF THEM

FRONTISPIECE.

ONE OF THEM

BY

CHARLES LEVER

AUTHOR OF "CHARLES O'MALLEY"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JAMES WHITESIDE, M.P.

ETC., ETC., ETC.

My dear Whiteside,

Amongst all the friends I can count over in my own country, and from whom space and the accidents of life have separated, and may separate me to the last, there is not "One of Them" for whom I entertain a sincerer regard, united with a higher hope, than yourself; and it is in my pride to say so openly, that I ask you to accept of this dedication from

Your attached friend,

CHARLES LEVER.

Spezia, *December* 20, 1860.

A WORD OF APOLOGY FOR MY TITLE.

Before I begin my story, let me crave my reader's indulgence for a brief word of explanation, for which I know no better form than a parable.

There is an Eastern tale—I forget exactly where or by whom told—of a certain poor man, who, being in extreme distress, and sorely puzzled as to how to eke out a livelihood, bethought him to give out that he was a great magician, endowed with the most marvellous powers, amongst others, that of tracing out crime, and detecting the secret history of all guilty transactions. Day after day did he proclaim to the world his wonderful gifts, telling his fellow-citizens what a remarkable man was amongst them, and bidding them thank Destiny for the blessing of his presence. Now, though the story has not recorded whether their gratitude was equal to the occasion, we are informed that the Caliph heard of the great magician, and summoned him to his presence, for it chanced just at the moment that the royal treasury had been broken into by thieves, and gems of priceless value carried away.

"Find out these thieves for me," said the Caliph, "or with your own head pay the penalty of their crime."

"Grant me but forty days, O king," cried he, "and I will bring them all before you."

So saying, he went away, but was no sooner at home and in the solitude of his own house, than he tore his beard, beat

his breast, and humbling his head to the ground, cried out, "Son of a burned father was I, not to be content with poverty and a poor existence! Why did I ever pretend to gifts that I had not, or dare to tell men that I possessed powers that were not mine? See to what vainglory and boastfulness have brought me. In forty days I am to die an ignominious death!"

Thus grieving and self-accusing, the weary hours passed over, and the night closed in only to find him in all the anguish of his sorrow; nor was it the least poignant of his sufferings, as he bethought him that already one of his forty days was drawing to its close, for in his heart he had destined this period to enjoyment and self-indulgence.

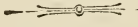
Now, though aspiring to the fame of a magician, so little learning did he possess, that it was only by recourse to a contrivance he was able to reckon the days as they passed, and calculate how much of life remained to him. The expedient he hit upon was to throw each night into an olive-jar a single date, by counting which at any time he could know how many days had elapsed.

While his own conscience smote him bitterly for the foolish deception he had practised, there were, as it happened, others who had consciences too, and somewhat more heavily charged than his own. These were the thieves who had stolen the treasure, and who firmly believed in the magician's powers. Now, it so chanced, that on the very instant he was about to throw his first date into the jar, one of the robbers had crept noiselessly to the window, and peering through the half-closed shutter, watched what was doing within. Dimly lighted by a single lamp, the chamber was half shrouded in a mysterious gloom; still, the figure of a man could be descried, as, with gestures of sorrow and suffering, he approached a great jar in the middle of the room and bent over it. It was doubtless an incantation,

and the robber gazed with all eagerness; but what was his terror as he beheld the man drop something into the jar, exclaiming, as he did so, in a loud voice, "Let Allah be merciful to us! there is one of them!" With the speed of a guilty heart he hurried back to his confederates, saying, "I had but placed my eye to the chink, when he knew that I was there, and cried, 'Ha! there is one of them!'"

It is not necessary that I should go on to tell how each night a new thief stole to the window at the same critical moment to witness the same ceremony, and listen to the same terrible words; as little needful to record how, when the last evening of all closed in, and the whole robber band stood trembling without, the magician dropped upon his knees, and throwing in the last of his dates, cried out, "There are all of them!" The application of the story is easy. You, good reader, are the Caliph—the mock magician is myself. Our tale will, probably, from time to time, reveal who may be

"One of Them."



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ONE OF THEM.

CHAPTER I.

A PIAZZA AFTER SUNSET.

One of the most depressing and languid of all objects is the aspect of an Italian city in the full noon of a hot summer's day. The massive buildings, fortress-like and stern, which show no touch of life and habitation; the glaring streets, untraversed by a single passer; the wide Piazza, staring vacantly in the broiling sun; the shop doors closed, all evidencing the season of the siesta, seem all waiting for the hour when long shadows shall fall over the scorched pavement, and some air—faint though it be—of coming night recall the population to a semblance of active existence.

With the air of a heated wayfarer, throwing open his coat to refresh himself, the city, at last, flings wide jalousie and shutter, and the half-baked inhabitant strolls forth to taste the "bel fresco." It is the season when nationalities are seen undisturbed by the presence of strangers. No travellers are now to be met with; the heavy rumbling of the travelling-carriage no longer thunders over the massive causeway; no postilion's whip awakes the echoes of the Piazza; no landlord's bell summons the eager household to the deep-arched doorway. It is the People alone are abroad —that gentle Italian people, quiet-looking, inoffensive as they are. A sort of languid grace, a kind of dignified melancholy, pervades their demeanour, not at all unpleasing; and if the stranger come fresh from the west of Europe, with its busy turmoil and zeal of money-getting, he cannot but experience a sense of calm and relief in the aspect of this easily satisfied and simple population. As the gloom of evening thickens the scene assumes more of life and movement. Vendors of

cooling drinks, iced lemonades, and such-like, move along with gay flags flaunting over the brilliant urn-like copper that contains the refreshing beverage. Water-melons, in all the gushing richness of colour, are at every corner, and piles of delicious fruit lie under the motley glare from many a paper lantern. Along the quays and bridges, on wide terraces or jutting bastions, wherever a breath of fresh air can be caught, crowds are seated, quietly enjoying the cool hour. Not a sound to be heard, save the incessant motion of the fan, which is, to this season, what is the cicala to the hot hour of noon. One cannot help feeling struck by the aspect of a people come thus to blend, like the members of one large family. There they are, of every age, and of every condition, mingling with a sort of familiar kindliness, that seems like a domesticity.

In all this open-air life, with its inseparable equality, one sees the embers of that old fire which once kindled the Italian heart in the days of their proud and glorious Republics. They are the descendants of those who, in the self-same spots, discussed the acts of Doges and Senates, haughty citizens of states, the haughtiest of all their age—and now——

Whether come by chance, or detained by some accident, two English travellers were seated one evening in front of the "Café Doney," at Florence, in contemplation of such a scene as this, listlessly smoking their cigars; they conversed occasionally, in that "staccato" style of conversation known to smokers.

One was an elderly, fine-looking man, of that hale and hearty stamp we like to think English; the young fellow at his side was so exactly his counterpart in lineament and feature, that none could doubt them to be father and son. It is true that the snow-white hair of one was represented by a rich auburn in the other, and the quiet humour that lurked about the father's mouth was concealed in the son's by a handsome moustache, most carefully trimmed and curled.

The café behind them was empty, save at a single table, where sat a tall, gaunt, yellow-cheeked man, counting and recounting a number of coins the waiter had given him in change, and of whose value he seemed to entertain misgivings, as he held them up one by one to the light and examined them closely. In feature he was acute and penetrating, with a mixture of melancholy and intrepidity peculiarly characteristic; his hair was long, black, and waveless, and fell heavily over the collar of his coat behind; his dress

was a suit of coffee-coloured brown—coat, waistcoat, and trousers; and even to his high-peaked conical hat the same tint extended. In age he might have been anything from two-and-thirty to forty, or upwards.

Attracted by an extraordinary attempt of the stranger to express himself in Italian to the waiter, the young Englishman turned round, and then as quickly leaning down towards his father, said, in a subdued voice, "Only think; there he is again! The Yankee we met at Meurice's, at Spa, Ems, the Righi, Como, and Heaven knows where besides! There he is talking Italian, own brother to his French, and with the same success too!"

"Well, well, Charley," said the other, good-humouredly, "it is not from an Englishman can come the sneer about such blunders. We make sad work of genders and declensions ourselves; and as for our American, I rather like him, and am not sorry to meet him again."

"You surely cannot mean that. There's not a fault of his nation that he does not, in one shape or other, represent; and, in a word, he is a bore of the first water."

"The accusation of boredom is one of those ugly confessions which ennui occasionally makes of its own inability to be interested. Now, for my part, the Yankee does not bore me. He is a sharp, shrewd man, always eager for information."

"I'd call him inquisitive," broke in the younger.

"There's an honest earnestness, too, in his manner—a rough vigour——"

"That recalls stump-oratory, and that sledge-hammer school so popular 'down west.'"

"It is because he is intensely American that I like him, Charley. I heartily respect the honest zeal with which he tells you that there are no institutions, no country, no people to be compared with his own."

"To me, the declaration is downright offensive; and I think there is a wide interval between prejudice and an enlightened patriotism. And when I hear an American claim for his nation a pre-eminence, not alone in courage, skill, and inventive genius, but in all the arts of civilization and refinement, I own I'm at a loss whether to laugh at or leave him."

"Take my advice, Charley, don't do either; or, if you must do one of the two, better even the last than the first."

Half stung by the tone of reproof in these words, and half angry with himself, perhaps, for his own petulance, the young man flung the end of his cigar away, and walked out into

the street. Scarcely, however, had he done so when the subject of their brief controversy arose, and approached the Englishman, saying, with a drawling tone and nasal accent, "How is your health, stranger? I hope I see you pretty well?"

"Quite so, I thank you," said the other cordially, as he moved a chair towards him.

"You've made a considerable tour of it"—(pronounced 'tower')—"since we met, I reckon. You were bound to do Lombardy, and the silkworms, and the rice-fields, and the ancient cities, and the galleries, and such-like—and you've done them?"

The Englishman bowed assent.

"Well, sir, so have I, and it don't pay. No, it don't! It's noways pleasing to a man with a right sense of human natur' to see a set of half-starved squalid loafers making a livin' out of old tombs and ruined churches, with lying stories about martyrs' thumb-nails and saints' shin-bones. That won't make a people, sir, will it?"

"But you must have seen a great deal to interest you, notwithstanding."

"At Genōa, sir. I like Genōa—they're a wide-awake, active set there. They've got trade, sir, and they know it."

"The city, I take it, is far more prosperous than pleasant, for strangers?"

"Well now, sir, that ere remark of yours strikes me as downright narrow, and, if I might be permitted, I'd call it mean illiberal. Why should you or I object to people who prefer their own affairs to the pleasant task of amusing us?"

"Nay, I only meant to observe that one might find more agreeable companions than men intently immersed in money-getting."

"Another error, and a downright English error, too; for it's one of your national traits, stranger, always to abuse the very thing that you do best. What are you as a people but a hard-working, industrious, serious race, ever striving to do this a little cheaper, and that a little quicker, so as to beat the foreigner, and with all that you'll stand up and say there ain't nothing on this universal globe to be compared to loafing!"

"I would hope that you have not heard this sentiment from an Englishman."

"Not in them words, not exactly in them terms, but from the same platform, stranger. Why, when you want to exalt a man for any great service to the state, you ain't satisfied with making him a loafer—for a lord is just a loafer, and no

more nor no less—but you make his son a loafer, and all his descendants for ever. What would you say to a fellow that had a fast trotter, able to do his mile, on a fair road, in two forty-three, who, instead of keeping him in full working condition, and making him earn his penny, would just turn him out in a paddock to burst himself with clover, and the same with all his stock, for no other earthly reason than that they were the best blood and bone to be found anywhere? There ain't sense or reason in that, stranger, is there?"

"I don't think the parallel applies."

"Maybe not, sir; but you have my meaning; perhaps I piled the metaphor too high; but as John Jacob Byles says, 'If the charge has hit you, it don't signify a red cent what the wadding was made of.'"

"I must say I think you are less than just in your estimate of our men of leisure," said the Englishman, mildly.

"I ain't sure of that, sir; they live too much together, like our people down south, and that's not the way to get rid of prejudices. They've none of that rough-and-tumble with the world as makes men broad-minded, and marciful, and forgiving; and they come at last to that wickedest creed of all, to think themselves the superfine salt of the earth. Now, there ain't no superfine salt peculiar to any rank or class. Human natur' is good and bad everywhere—ay, sir, I'll go further, I've seen good in a Nigger!"

"I'm glad to hear you say so," said the Englishman, repressing, but not without difficulty, a tendency to smile.

"Yes, sir, there's good amongst all men,—even the Irish."

"I feel sorry that you should make them an extreme case."

"Well, sir," said he, drawing a long breath, "they're main ugly—main ugly, that's a fact. Not that they can do *us* any mischief. Our constitution is a mill where there's never too much water—the more power, the more we grind; and even if the stream do come down somewhat stocked with snags and other rubbish upon it, the machine is an almighty smasher, and don't leave one fragment sticking to the other when it gets a stroke at 'em. Have you never been in the States, stranger?"

"Never. I have often planned such a ramble, but circumstances have somehow or other always interfered with the accomplishment."

"Well, sir, you're bound to go there, if only to correct the wrong impressions of your literary people, who do nothing but slander and belie us."

"Not latterly, surely. You have nothing to complain of on the part of our late travellers."

"I won't say that. They don't make such a fuss about chewing and whittling, and the like, as the first fellows; but they go on a-sneering about political dishonesty, Yankee sharpness, and trade rogueries, that ain't noways pleasing —and, what's more, it ain't fair. But as *I* say, sir, go and see for yourself, or, if you can't do that, send your son. Isn't that young man there your son?"

The young Englishman turned and acknowledged the allusion to himself by the coldest imaginable bow, and that peculiarly unspeculative stare so distinctive in his class and station.

"I'm unreasonable proud to see you again, sir," said the Yankee, rising.

"Too much honour!" said the other, stiffly.

"No it ain't—no honour whatever. It's a fact, though, and that's better. Yes, sir, I like *you!*"

The young man merely bowed his acknowledgment, and looked even more haughty than before. It was plain, however, that the American attached little significance to the disdain of his manner, for he continued in the same easy, unembarrassed tone,—

"Yes, sir, I was at Lucerne that morning when you flung the boatman into the lake that tried to prevent your landing out of the boat. I saw how you buckled to your work, and I said to myself, 'There's good stuff there, though he looks so uncommon conceited and proud.'"

"Charley is ready enough at that sort of thing," said the father, laughing heartily; and, indeed, after a moment of struggle to maintain his gravity, the young man gave way and laughed too.

The American merely looked from one to the other, half sternly, and as if vainly trying to ascertain the cause of their mirth. The elder Englishman was quick to see the awkwardness of the moment, and apply a remedy to it.

"I was amused," said he, good-humouredly, "at the mention of what had obtained for my son your favourable opinion. I believe that it's only amongst the Anglo-Saxon races that pugnacity takes place as a virtue."

"Well, sir, if a man hasn't got it, it very little matters what other qualities he possesses. They say courage is a bull-dog's property; but would any one like to be lower than a bull-dog? Besides, sir, it is what has made *you* great, and *us* greater."

There was a tone of defiance in this speech evidently meant to provoke a discussion, and the young man turned angrily round to accept the challenge, when a significant look from his father restrained him. With a few commonplace observations dexterously thrown out, the old man contrived to change the channel of conversation, and then, reminded by his watch of the lateness of the hour, he apologized for a hasty departure, and took his leave.

"Well, was I right?" said the young man, as he walked along at his father's side. "Is he not a bore, and the worst of all bores, too—a quarrelsome one?"

"I'm not so sure of that, Charley. It was plain he didn't fancy our laughing so heartily, and wanted an explanation which he saw no means of asking for; and it was, perhaps, as a sort of reprisal he made that boastful speech; but I am deeply mistaken if there be not much to like and respect in that man's nature."

"There may be some grains of gold in the mud of the Arno there, if any one would spend a life to search for them," said the youth, contemptuously. And with this ungracious speech the conversation closed, and they walked on in silence.

CHAPTER II.

THE VILLA CAPRINI.

It was a few days after the brief scene we have just recorded that the two Englishmen were seated, after sunset, on a little terraced plateau in front of an antiquated villa. As they are destined to be intimate acquaintances of our reader in this tale, let us introduce them by name—Sir William Heathcote and his son Charles.

With an adherence to national tastes which are rapidly fading away, they were enjoying their wine after dinner, and the spot they had selected for it was well chosen. From the terrace where they sat, a perfect maze of richly wooded glens could be seen, crossing and recrossing each other in every direction. From the depths of some arose the light spray of boiling mountain torrents; others, less wild in character, were

marked by the blue smoke curling up from some humble homestead. Many a zig-zag path of trellis-vines straggled up the hill-sides, now, half-buried in olives, now, emerging in all the grotesque beauty of its own wayward course. The tall maize and the red lucerne grew luxuriously beneath the fig and the pomegranate, while here and there the rich soil, rent with heat, seemed unable to conceal its affluence, and showed the yellow gourds and the melons bursting up through the fruitful earth. It was such a scene as at once combined Italian luxuriance with the verdant freshness of a Tyrol landscape, and of which the little territory that once called itself the Duchy of Lucca can boast many instances.

As background to the picture, the tall mountains of Carrara, lofty enough to be called Alps, rose, snow-capped and jagged in the distance, and upon their summits the last rays of the setting sun now glowed with the ruddy brilliancy of a carbuncle.

These Italian landscapes win one thoroughly from all other scenery, after a time. At first they seem hard and stern; there is a want of soft distances; the eye looks in vain for the blended shadows of northern landscape and that rustic character so suggestive of country life; but in their clear distinctness, their marvellous beauty of outline, and in that vastness of view imparted by an atmosphere of cloudless purity, there are charms indisputably great.

As the elder Englishman looked upon this fair picture, he gave a faint sigh, and said, "I was thinking, Charley, what a mistake we make in life in not seeking out such spots as these when the world goes well with us, and we have our minds tuned to enjoyment, instead of coming to them careworn and weary, and when, at best, they only distract us momentarily from our griefs."

"And my thought," said the younger, "was, what a blunder it is to come here at all. This villa life was only endurable by your Italian noble, who came here once a year to squabble with his 'Fattore' and grind his peasants. He came to see that they gave him his share of oil and didn't water his miserable wine; he neither had society nor sport. As to our English country-house life, what can compare with it!"

"Even that we have over-civilized, making it London in everything—London hours, London company, topics, habits, tastes, all smacking of town life. Who, I ask you, thinks of his country existence, now-a-days, as a period of quietness and tranquil enjoyment? Who goes back to the shade of his

old elms to be with himself or some favourite author that he feels to like as a dear friend?"

"No; but he goes for famous hunting and the best shooting in Europe, it being no disparagement to either that he gets back at evening to a capital dinner and as good company as he'd find in town."

"May is of *my* mind," said Sir William, half triumphantly; "she said so last night."

"And she told me exactly the reverse this morning," said the younger. "She said the monotony of this place was driving her mad. Scenery, she remarked, without people, is pretty much what a panorama is, compared to a play."

"May is a traitress; and here she comes to make confession to which of us she has been false," said Sir William, gaily, as he arose to place a chair for the young girl who now came towards them.

"I have heard you both, gentlemen," said she, with a saucy toss of her head, "and I should like to hear why I should not agree with each and disagree afterwards, if it so pleased me."

"Oh! if you fall back upon prerogative——" began Sir William.

"I have never quitted it. It is in the sovereignty of my woman's will that I reconcile opinions seemingly adverse, and can enjoy all the splendours of a capital and all the tameness of a village. I showed you already how I could appreciate Paris; I mean now to prove how charmed I can be with the solitudes of Marlia."

"Which says, in plain English," said the young man, "that you don't care for either."

"Will you condescend to be a little more gallant than my cousin, sir," said she, turning to Sir William, "and at least give me credit for having a mind and knowing it?"

There was a pettish half-seriousness in her tone that made it almost impossible to say whether she was amused or angry, and to this also the changeful expression of her beautiful features contributed, for, though she smiled, her dark grey eyes sparkled like one who invited a contradiction. In this fleeting trait was the secret of her nature. May Leslie was one of Fortune's spoiled children—one of those upon whom so many graces and good gifts had been lavished, that it seemed as though Fate had exhausted her resources, and left herself no more to bestow.

She had surpassing beauty, youth, health, high spirits, and immense wealth. By her father's will she had been

contracted in marriage with her distant relative, Charles Heathcote, with the proviso that if, on attaining the age of nineteen, she felt averse to the match, she should forfeit a certain estate in Wales, which had once belonged to the Heathcotes, and contained the old residence of that family.

Sir William and his son had been living in the retirement of a little German capital, when the tidings of this wardship reached them. A number of unfortunate speculations had driven the baronet into exile from England, and left him with a pittance barely sufficient to live in the strictest economy. To this narrow fortune Charles Heathcote had come back, after serving in a most extravagant Hussar regiment, and taking his part in an Indian campaign, and the dashing soldier first heard, as he lay wounded in the hospital, that he must leave the service, and retire into obscurity. If it had not been for his strong affection for his father, Charles would have enlisted as a private soldier, and taken his chance for future distinction, but he could not desert him at such a moment, nor separate himself from that share of privation which should be henceforth borne in common; and so he came back, a bronzed, brave soldier, true-hearted and daring, and, if a little stern, no more so than might be deemed natural in one who had met such a heavy reverse on the very threshold of life.

Father and son were at supper in a little arbour of their garden near Weimar, when the post brought them the startling news that May Leslie, who was then at Malta, would be at Paris in a few days, where she expected to meet them. When Sir William had read through the long letter of the lawyer, giving an account of the late General Leslie's will, with its strange condition, he handed it to his son, without a word.

The young man read it eagerly: his colour changed once or twice as he went on, and his face grew harder and sterner ere he finished. "Do you mean to accept this wardship?" asked he, hurriedly.

"There are certain reasons for which I cannot decline it, Charley," said the other, mildly. "All my life long I have been Tom Leslie's debtor, in gratitude, for as noble a sacrifice as ever man made. We were both suitors to your mother, brother officers at the time, and well received in her father's house. Leslie, however, was much better looked on than myself, for I was then but a second son, while he was the heir of a very large estate. There could not have been a doubt that his advances would have outweighed mine in a

father and mother's estimate, and as he was madly in love, there seemed nothing to prevent his success. Finding, however, in a conversation with your mother, that her affections were mine, he not only relinquished the place in my favour, but, although most eager to purchase his troop, suffered me, his junior, to pass over his head, and thus attain the rank which enabled me to marry. Leslie went to India, where he married, and we never met again. It was only some seven or eight months ago I read of his being named governor of a Mediterranean dependency, and the very next paper mentioned his death, when about to leave Calcutta."

"It is, then, most probable that, when making this will, he had never heard of our reverses in fortune?" said the young man.

"It is almost certain he had not, for it is dated the very year of that panic which ruined me."

"And, just as likely, might never have left such a will, had he known our altered fortunes?"

"I'm not so sure of that: at all events, I can answer for it that no change in our condition would have made Tom Leslie alter the will, if he had once made it in our favour."

"I have no fancy for the compact, read it how you may," said Charles, impatiently; "nor can I say which I like least, the notion of marrying a woman who is bound to accept me, or accepting a forfeit to release her from the obligation."

"I own it is—embarrassing," said Sir William, after a moment's hesitation in choosing a suitable word.

"A downright indignity, I'd call it," said the other, warmly, "and calculated to make the man odious in the woman's eyes, whichever lot befel him."

"The wardship must be accepted, at all events," said Sir William, curtly, as he arose and folded up the letter.

"You are the best judge of that; for if it depended upon *me*——"

"Come, come, Charley," said Sir William, in his tone of habitual kindness, "this life of quiet obscurity and poverty that we lead here has no terrors for *me*. I have been so long away from England, that if I went back to-morrow I should look in vain for any of my old companions. I have forgotten the habits and the ways of home, and I have learned to submit myself to twenty things here which would be hardships elsewhere, but I don't like to contemplate the same sort of existence for *you:* I want to speculate on a very different future; and if—if—— Nay, you need not feel so impatient at a mere conjecture."

"Well, to another point," said the young man, hastily. "We have got, as you have just said, to know that we can live very comfortably and contentedly, here, looking after our celery and seakale, and watching our silver groschen; are you so very certain that you'd like to change all this life, and launch out into an expensive style of living, to suit the notions of a rich heiress, and, what is worse again, to draw upon *her* resources to do it?"

"I won't deny that it will cost me severely, but, until we see her and know her, Charley, until we find out whether she may be one whose qualities will make our sacrifices easy——"

"Would you accept this charge if she were perfectly portionless, and without a shilling in the world?"

"If she were Tom Leslie's daughter, do you mean?"

"Ay, any one's daughter?"

"To be sure I would, boy: and if I were only to consult my own feelings in the matter, I'd say that I'd prefer this alternative to the other."

"Then I have no more to say," said the son, as he walked away.

Within a month after this conversation, the little cottage was shut up, the garden wicket closed with a heavy padlock, and to any chance inquirer after its late residents, the answer returned was, that their present address was Place Vendôme, Paris.

"Tell me your company," said the old adage; but, alas! the maxim had reference to other habits than our present day ones. With what company now does not every man mix? Bishops discuss crime and punishment with ticket-of-leave men; fashionable exquisites visit the resorts of thieves; "swell people" go to hear madrigals at Covent Garden; and, as for the Ring, it is equally the table-land to peer and pickpocket. If, then, you would hazard a guess as to a man's manners now-a-days, ask not his company, but his whereabouts. Run your eye over the addresses of that twice-remanded insolvent, ranging from Norfolk Street, Strand, to Berkeley Square, with Boulogne-sur-Mer, St. John's Wood, Cadiz, the New Cut, Bermondsey, and the Edgware Road, in the interval, and say if you cannot, even out of such slight materials, sketch off his biography.

"The style is the man," says the adage; and we might with as much truth say, "the street is the man." In his locality is written his ways and means, his manners, his morals, his griefs, joys, and ambitions. We live in an age

prolific in this lesson. Only cast a glance at the daily sacrifices of those who, to reside within the periphery of greatness, submit to a crushing rent and a comfortless abode. Think of him who, to date his note "—— Street, Berkeley Square," denies himself honest indulgence, all because the world has come to believe that certain spots are the "Regions of the Best," and that they who live there must needs be that grand English ideal—respectable.

Dear me, what unheard-of sacrifices does it demand of humble fortunes to be Respectable! what pinching, and starving, and saving! what self-denial and what striving! what cheerless little dinner parties to other Respectables! what dyeing of black silks and stoving of old ostrich feathers! And how and wherefore have we wandered off in this digression! Simply to say, that Sir William Heathcote and his ward were living in a splendid quarter of Paris, and after that rambled into Germany, and thence to Como and down to Rome, very often delighted with their choice of residence, enjoying much that was enjoyable, but still—shall we own it?—never finding the exact place they seemed to want, nor exactly the people with whom they were willing to live in intimacy. They had been at Baden in the summer, at Como in the late autumn, at Rome in the winter, at Castellamare in the spring—everywhere in its season, and yet somehow—— And so they began to try that last resource of bored people—places out of the season and places out of common resort—and it was thus that they found themselves at Florence in June and in Marlia in July.

CHAPTER III.

TRAVELLING ACQUAINTANCE.

About the same hour of the same evening which we have just chronicled, a group of persons sat under some spreading chestnut-trees beside a brawling little rivulet at the Bagni de Lucca. They were travellers, chance acquaintances thrown together by the accidents of the road, and entertained for each other those varied sentiments of like and dislike, those mingled distrusts, suspicions, and beliefs which,

however unconsciously to ourselves, are part of the education travelling impresses, and which, when long persevered in, make up that acute, but not always amiable, individual we call "an old traveller."

We are not about to present them all to our reader, and will only beg to introduce to his notice a few of the notabilities then present. *Place aux dames!* then; and, first of all, we beg attention to the dark-eyed, dark-haired, and very delicately featured woman who, in half-mourning, and with a pretty but fantastically costumed girl beside her, is working at an embroidery-frame close to the river. She is a Mrs. Penthony Morris, the wife or the widow—both opinions prevail—of a Captain Penthony Morris, killed in a duel, or in India, or alive in the Marshalsea, or at Baden-Baden, as may be. She is striking-looking, admirably dressed, has a most beautiful foot, as you may see where it rests upon the rail of the chair placed in front of her, and is, altogether, what that very smartly dressed, much-beringed, and essenced young gentleman near her has already pronounced her, "a stunning fine woman." He is a Mr. Mosely, one of those unhappy young Londoners whose family fame is ever destined to eclipse their own gentility, for he is immediately recognized, and drawlingly do men inquire some twenty times a day, "Ain't he a son of Trip and Mosely's, those fellows in Bond Street?" Unhappy Trip and Mosely! why have you rendered yourselves so great and illustrious? why have your tasteful devices in gauze, your "sacrifices" in chalis, your "last new things in grenadine," made such celebrity around you, that Tom Mosely, "out for his travels," can no more escape the shop than if he were languishing at a customer over a "sweet article in white tarlatane"? In the two comfortable arm-chairs side by side sit two indubitable specimens, male and female, of the Anglo-Saxon family: Mr. Morgan, that florid man, wiping his polished bald head, and that fat lady fanning with all her might. Are they not English? They are "out," and, judging from their recorded experiences, only dying to be "in" again. "Such a set of cheating, lying, lazy set of rascals are these Italians! Independence, sir; don't talk to me of that humbug! What they want is English travellers to fleece and English women to marry." Near to these, at full length, on two chairs, one of which reclines against a tree at an angle of about forty degrees, sits our Yankee acquaintance, whom we may as well present by his name, Leonidas Shaver Quackinboss; he is smoking a "Virginian" about the size of a marshal's bâton,

and occasionally sipping at a "cobbler," which with much pains he has compounded for his own drinking. Various others of different ranks and countries are scattered about, and in the centre of all, at a small table with a lamp, sits a short, burly figure, with a strange mixture of superciliousness and drollery in his face, as though there were a perpetual contest in his nature whether he would be impertinent or amusing. This was Mr. Gorman O'Shea, Member of Parliament for Inchabogue, and for three weeks a Lord of the Treasury when O'Connell was king.

Mr. O'Shea is fond of public speaking. He has a taste for proposing, or seconding, or returning thanks that verges on a passion, so that even in a private dinner with a friend he has been known to arise and address his own companion in a set speech, a dornedwith all the graces and flowers of post-prandial eloquence. Upon the present occasion he has been, to his great delight, deputed to read aloud to the company from that magic volume by which the Continent is expounded to Englishmen, and in whose pages they are instructed in everything, from passports to pictures, and drilled in all the mysteries of money, posting, police regulations, domes, dinners, and Divine service by a Clergyman of the Established Church. In a word, he is reciting John Murray.

To understand the drift of the present meeting, we ought to mention that, in the course of a conversation started that day at the table d'hôte, it was suggested that such of the company as felt disposed might make an excursion to Marlia to visit a celebrated villa there, whose gardens alone were amongst the great sights of Northern Italy. All had heard of this charming residence; views of it had been seen in every print-shop. It had its historical associations from a very early period. There were chambers where murders had been committed, conspiracies held, confederates poisoned. King and Kaiser had passed the night there; all of which were duly and faithfully chronicled in "John," and impressively recited by Mr. Gorman O'Shea in the richest accents of his native Doric. "There you have it now," said he, as he closed the volume; "and I will say, it hasn't its equal anywhere for galleries, terraces, carved architraves, stuccoed ceilings, and frescoes, and all the other balderdash peculiar to these places."

"Oh, Mr. O'Shea, what profanation!" interposed Mrs. Morris; "walls immortalized by Giotto and Cimabue!"

"Haven't they got stunning names of their own?" broke in Quackinboss. "That's one of the smartest dodges to

secure fame. You must be something out of the common. There was a fellow up at Syracuse townland, Measles, North Carolāina, and his name was Flay Harris; they called him Flea——"

"That ceiling of the great hall was a work of Guido's, you said?" inquired Mrs. Morris.

"A pupil of Guido's, a certain Simone Affretti, who afterwards made the designs for the Twelve Apostles in the window of the chapter-room at Sienna," read out Mr. O'Shea.

"Who can vouch for one word of all that, sir?" burst in Mr. Morgan, with a choleric warmth. "Who is to tell *me*, sir, that you didn't write that, or Peter Noakes, or John Murray himself, if there be such a man."

"I can vouch for the last," said a pale, gentle-looking young fellow, who was arranging the flies in a fishing-book under a tree at a little distance. "If it will relieve you from any embarrassments on the score of belief, I can assist you so far."

If there was a faint irony in this speech, the mild look of the speaker and his softened accents made it seem of the very faintest, and so even the bluff Mr. Morgan himself appeared to acknowledge.

"As *you* say so, Mr. Layton, I will consent to suppose there is such a man; not that the fact, in the slightest degree, touches my original proposition."

"Certainly not, Tom," chimed in Mrs. Morgan, in a thick voice, like one drowning.

"But if you doubt Guido, you may doubt Raphael, Titian, Michael Angelo," burst in Mrs. Morris, with a holy terror in her voice.

"Well, ma'am, I'm capable of all that—and worse."

What that "worse" was there is no saying, though possibly Mr. Mosely was trying to guess at it in the whisper he ventured to Mrs. Morris, and which made that lady smile incredulously.

"I now, sir, rise to put the original motion," said O'Shea, assuming that parliamentary tone which scandal pretended he displayed everywhere but in the House; "is it the opinion of this committee that we should all go and visit the Villa Caprini?"

"Are we quite sure it is to be seen?" interposed Mr. Layton; "it may be occupied, and by persons who have no fancy to receive strangers."

"The observation strikes me as singularly narrow and

illiberal, sir," burst in Morgan, with warmth. "Are we of the nineteenth century to be told that any man—I don't care how he calls himself—has a vested right in the sight or inspection of objects devised, and designed, and completed centuries before he was born?"

"Well put, Tom—remarkably well put," smothered out Mrs. Morgan.

"Will you say, sir"—assumed he, thus cheered on to victory—"will you say, sir, that if these objects—frescoes, bas-reliefs, or whatever other name you give them—have the humanizing influence you assume for them—which, by the way, I am quite ready to dispute at another opportunity with you or that other young gentleman yonder, whose simpering sneer would seem to disparage my sentiment——"

"If you mean me, sir," took up Mr. Mosely, "I wasn't so much as attending to one word you said."

"No, Tom, certainly not," burst in Mrs. Morgan, answering with energy some sudden ejaculated purpose of her wrathy spouse.

"I simply meant to say," interposed Layton, mildly, "that such a visit as we propose might be objected to, or conceded in a way little agreeable to ourselves."

"A well-written note, a gracefully worded request, which nobody could do better than Mr. Alfred Layton——" began Mrs. Morris, when a dissenting gesture from that gentleman stopped her. "Or perhaps," continued she, "Mr. Gorman O'Shea would so far assist our project?"

"My motion is to appear at the bar of the house—I mean at the gate-lodge—sending in our names, with a polite inquiry to know if we may see the place," said Mr. O'Shea.

"Well, stranger, I stand upon your platform," chimed in Quackinboss; "I'm in no manner of ways 'posted' up in your Old World doings, but I'd say that you've fixed the question all straight."

"Show-places are show-places; the people who take them know it," blurted out Mr. Morgan. "Ay, and what's more, they're proud of it."

"They are, Tom," said his wife, authoritatively.

"If you'd give me one of them a present, for the living in it, I'd not take it. No, sir, I'd not," reiterated Morgan, with a fierce energy. "What is a man in such a case, sir, but a sort of appraiser, a kind of agent to show off his own furniture, telling you to remark that cornice, and not to forget that malachite chimney-piece?"

"Very civil of him, certainly," said Layton, in his low,

quiet voice, which, at the same time, seemed to quiver with a faint irony.

"No, sir, not civil, only boastful; mere purse-pride, nothing more."

"Nothing, Tom—absolutely nothing."

"What's before the house this evening—the debate looks animated?" said a fine bright-eyed boy of about fourteen, who lounged carelessly on Layton's shoulder as he came up.

"It was a little scheme to visit the Villa Caprina, my lord," said Mosely, not sorry to have the opportunity of addressing himself to a person of title.

"How jolly, eh, Alfred? What say you to the plan?" said the boy, merrily.

Layton answered something, but in a tone too low to be overheard.

"Oh, as to that," replied the boy, quickly, "if he be an Englishman who lives there, surely some of us must know him."

"The very remark I was about to make, my lord," smiled in Mrs. Morris.

"Well, then, we agree to go there, that's the main thing," said O'Shea. "Two carriages, I suppose, will hold us; and, as to the time, shall we say to-morrow?"

To-morrow was unanimously voted by the company, who now set themselves to plot the details of the expedition, amidst which not the least knotty was, who were to be the fellow-travellers with Mr. and Mrs. Morgan, a post of danger assuredly not sought for with any heroic intrepidity, while an equally eager intrigue was on foot about securing the presence of the young Marquis of Agincourt and his tutor, Mr. Layton. The ballot, however, routed all previous machinations, deciding that the young peer was to travel with the Morgans and Colonel Quackinboss, an announcement which no deference to the parties themselves could prevent being received with a blank disappointment, except by Mr. Layton, who simply said,—

"We shall take care to be in time, Mrs. Morgan." And then, drawing his pupil's arm within his own, strolled negligently away.

CHAPTER IV.

VISITORS.

"I FORETOLD all this," said Charles Heathcote, peevishly, as a servant presented a number of visiting-cards with a polite request from the owners to be allowed to visit the villa and its gardens. "I often warned you of the infliction of inhabiting one of these celebrated places, which our inquisitive countrymen *will* see and their wives *will* write about."

"Who are they, Charley?" said May, gaily. "Let us see if we may not know some of them."

"Know them. Heaven forbid! Look at the equipages they have come in; only cast an eye at the two leathern conveniences now before the door, and say, is it likely that they contain any acquaintances of ours?"

"How hot they look, broiling down there! But who are they, Charley?"

"Mrs. Penthony Morris—never heard of her; Mr. Algernon Mosely—possibly the Bond Street man; Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Rice Morgan, of Plwmnwrar, however that be pronounced; Mr. Layton and friend—discreet friend, who will not figure by name; Mr. Gorman O'Shea, by all the powers! and, as I live, our Yankee again!"

"Not Quackinboss, surely?" broke in Sir William, good-humouredly.

"Yes. There he is: 'U.S.A., Colonel Leonidas Shaver Quackinboss;' and there's the man, too, with his coat on his arm, on that coach-box."

"I'll certainly vote for my Transatlantic friend," said the baronet, "and consequently for any party of which he is a member."

"As for me!" cried May—"I've quite a curiosity to see him; not to say that it would be downright churlishness to refuse any of our countrymen the permission thus asked for."

"Be it so. I only stipulate for not playing cicerone to our amiable visitors; and the more surely to escape such an indignity, I'm off till dinner."

"Let Fenton wait on those gentlemen," said the baronet, "and go round with them through the house and the grounds.

Order luncheon also to be ready." There was a little, a very little, irritation, perhaps, in his voice, but May's pleasant smile quickly dispelled the momentary chagrin, and his good-humoured face was soon itself again.

If I have not trespassed upon my reader's patience by minute descriptions of the characters I have introduced to him, it is in the expectation that their traits are such as, lying lightly on the surface, require little elucidation. Nor do I ask of him to bestow more attention to their features than he would upon those of travelling acquaintances with whom it is his fortune to journey in company for a brief space.

Strange enough, indeed, is that intimacy of travelling acquaintanceship! familiar, without friendship—frank, without being cordial. Curious pictures of life might be made from these groups thrown accidentally together in a steamboat, or railroad, at the gay watering-place, or the little fishing-village in the bathing-season.

How free is all the intercourse of those who seem to have taken a vow with themselves never to meet each other again! with what humorous zest do they enjoy the oddities of this one, or the eccentricities of that, making up little knots and cliques, to be changed or dissolved within the day, and actually living on the eventualities of the hour, for their confidences! The contrasts that would repel in ordinary life, the disparities that would discourage, have actually invited intimacy; and people agree to associate, even familiarly, with those whom, in the recognized order of their daily existence, they would have as coldly repelled.

There was little to bind those together whom we have represented as seated under the chestnut trees at the Bagni de Lucca. They entertained their suspicions, and distrusts, and misgivings of each other to a liberal extent; they wasted no charities in their estimate of each other; and, wherever posed by a difficulty, they did not lend to the interpretation any undue amount of generosity; nay, they even went further, and argued from little peculiarities of dress, manner, and demeanour, to the whole antecedents of him they criticized, and took especial pains in their moments of confidence to declare that they had only met Mr. —— for the first time at Ems, and never saw Mrs. —— "till they were overtaken by the snow-storm on the Splugen."

Such-like was the company who now, headed by the obsequious butler, strolled leisurely through the spacious saloons of the Villa Caprini.

Who is there, in this universal vagabondage, has not made one of such groups? Where is the man that has not strolled, "John Murray" in hand, along his Dresden, his Venice, or his Rome; staring at ceilings, and gazing ruefully at time-discoloured frescoes—grieved to acknowledge to his own heart how little he could catch of a connoisseur's enthusiasm, or an antiquarian's fervour—wondering within himself wherefore he could not feel like that other man, whose raptures he was reading, and with sore misgivings that some nice sense had been omitted in his nature? Wonderfully poignant and painful things are these little appeals to an inner consciousness. How far such sentiments were distributed amongst those who now lounged and stared through *salon* and gallery, we must leave to the reader's own appreciation. They looked pleased, convinced, and astonished, and, be it confessed, "bored" in turn; they were called upon to admire much they did not care for, and wonder at many things which did not astonish them; they were often referred to histories which they had forgotten, if they ever knew them, and to names of whose celebrity they were ignorant; and it was with a most honest sense of relief they saw themselves reach the last room of the suite, where a few cabinet pictures and some rare carvings in ivory alone claimed their attention.

"A 'Virgin and Child,' by Murillo," said the guide.

"The ninth 'Virgin and Child,' by all that's holy!" said Mr. O'Shea. "The ninth we have seen to-day!"

"The blue drapery, ladies and gentlemen," continued the inexorable describer, "is particularly noticed. It is 'glazed' in a manner only known to Murillo."

"I'm glad of it, and I hope the secret died with him," cried Mr. Morgan. "It looks for all the world like a bathing-dress."

"The child squints. Don't he squint?" exclaimed Mosely.

"Oh, for shame!" cried Mrs. Morris. "Mr. Layton is quite shocked with your profane criticism."

"I did not hear it, I assure you," said that gentleman, as he arose from a long and close contemplation of a "St. John," by Salvator.

"'St. John preaching in the Wilderness!'" said Quackinboss; "too tame for my taste. He don't seem to roll up his sleeves to the work—does he?"

"It's not stump-oratory, surely?" said Layton, with a quiet smile.

"Ain't it, though! Well, stranger, I'm in a cōn-siderable unmixed error if it is not! You'd like to maintain

that because a man doesn't rise up from a velvet cushion and lay his hand upon a grand railing, all carved with grotesque intricacies, all his sentiments must needs be commonplace and vulgar; but I'm here to tell you, sir, that you'd hear grander things, nobler things, and greater things, from a moss-covered old tree-stump in a western pine-forest, by the mouth of a plain, hardy son of hard toil, than you've often listened to in what you call your place in Parliament. Now that's a fact!"

There was that amount of energy in the way these words were uttered that seemed to say, if carried further, the discussion might become contentious.

Mr. Layton did not show any disposition to accept the gage of battle, but turned to seek for his pupil.

"You're looking for the Marquis, Mr. Layton," asked Mrs. Morris, "ain't you? I think you'll find him in the shrubberies, for he said all this only bored him, and he'd go and look for a cool spot to smoke his cigar."

"That's what it all comes to," said Morgan, as soon as Layton had left the room; "that's the whole of it! You pay a fellow—a 'double first' something or other from Oxford or Cambridge—five hundred a year to go abroad with your son, and all he teaches him is to choose a cheroot."

"And smoke it, Tom," chimed in Mrs. Morgan.

"There ain't no harm in a weed, sir, I hope?" said Quackinboss. "The thinkers of this earth are most of 'em smoking men. What do you say, sir, to Humboldt, Niebuhr your own Bulwer, and all our people, from John C. Colhoun to Daniel Webster? When a man puts a cigar between his lips, he as good as says, 'I'm a-reflecting—I'm not in no ways to be broke in upon.' It's his own fault, sir, if he doesn't think, for he has in a manner shut the door to keep out intruders."

"Filthy custom!" muttered Mr. Morgan, with a garbled sentence, in which the word "America" was half audible.

"What's this he's saying about eating—this Italian fellow?" said Mr. Mosely, as a servant addressed him in a foreign language.

"It is a polite invitation to a luncheon," said Mrs. Morris, modestly turning to her fellow-travellers for their decision.

"Do any of us know our host?" asked Mr. O'Shea. "He is a Sir William Heathcote."

"There was a director of the Central Trunk Line of that name, who failed for half a million sterling," whispered Morgan; "shouldn't wonder if it were he."

"All the more certain to give us a jolly feed, if he be!" chuckled Mosely. "I vote we accept."

"That of course," said Mrs. Morris.

"Well, I know him, I reckon," drawled out Quackinboss; "and I raythor suspect you owe this here politeness to *my* company. Yes, sir!" said he, half fiercely, to O'Shea, upon whose face a sort of incredulous smile was breaking—"yes, sir!"

"Being our own countryman, sir—an Englishman—I suspect," said Mr. Morgan, with warmth, "that the hospitality has been extended to us on wider grounds."

"But why should we dispute about the matter at all?" mildly remarked Mrs. Morris. "Let us say yes, and be grateful."

"There's good sense in that," chimed in Mosely, "and I second it."

"Carried with unanimity," said O'Shea, as, turning to the servant, he muttered something in broken French.

"Well, I'm sure, I never!" mumbled Quackinboss to himself; but what he meant, or to what new circumstance in his life's experience he alluded, there is unhappily no explanation in this history; but he followed the rest with a drooping head and an air of half-melancholy resignation that was not by any means unusual with him.

CHAPTER V.

ACCIDENTS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES.

When the young Marquis had made his escape from sight-seeing, and all its attendant inflictions, he was mainly bent on what he would himself have called being "very jolly"—that is to say, going his own way unmolested, strolling the road he fancied, and following out his own thoughts. Not that these same thoughts absolutely needed for their exercise or development any extraordinary advantages of solitude and retirement. He was no deep-minded sage, revolving worlds to come—no poet, in search of the inspiring influence of nature—no subtle politician, balancing the good and evil of some nice legisla-

tion. He was simply one of those many thousand England yearly turns out from her public schools of fine, dashing, free-hearted, careless boys, whose most marked feature in character is a wholesome horror of all that is mean or shabby. Less than a year before, he had been a midshipman in her Majesty's gun-boat *Mosquito;* the death of an elder brother had made him a Marquis, with the future prospect of several thousands a year.

He had scarcely seen or known his brother, so he grieved very little for his loss, but he sorrowed sincerely over the change of fortune that called him from his sea life and companions to an "on-shore" existence, and, instead of the gun-room and its gay guests, gave him the proprieties of station and the requirements of high rank. One of his guardians thought he ought to go into the Guards; another advised a university; both agreed upon a tutor, and Mr. Layton was found, a young man of small fortune, whose health, injured by over-reading for honours, required change of scene and rest. They had been companions for a very short time, but had, as the young lord would have said, "hit it off" admirably together; that is to say, partly from a just appreciation of his pupil, and partly out of a natural indolence of disposition, Layton interfered very little with him, gave him no troublesome tasks, imposed no actual studies, but contented himself with a careful watch over the boy's disposition, a gentle, scarce perceptible, correction of his faults, and an honest zeal to develop any generous trait in his nature, little mindful of the disappointments his trustfulness must incur. Layton's theory was that we all become wise too early in life, and that the world's lessons should not be too soon implanted in a fresh unsuspecting nature. His system was not destined to be sorely tested in the present case. Harry Montserrat, Marquis of Agincourt, was a fortunate subject to illustrate it by. There never was a less suspectful nature; he was frank, generous, and brave; his faults were those of a hot, fiery temper, and a disposition to resent, too early and too far, what with a little patience he might have tolerated or even forgiven.

The fault, however, which Layton was more particularly guardful against, was a certain over-consciousness of his station and its power, which gradually began to show itself.

In his first experience of altered fortune he did nothing but regret the past. It was no compensation to him for his careless sea-life, with all its pleasant associations, to become of a sudden invested with station, and treated with what he

deemed over-deference. His reefer's jacket was pleasanter "wear" than his padded frock-coat; the nimble boy who waited on him in the gun-room he thought a far smarter attendant than his obsequious valet; and, with all his midshipman's love of money-spending and squandering, the charm of extravagance was gone when there were no messmates to partake of it; nor did his well-groomed nag, and his well-dressed tiger, suggest one-half the enjoyment he had often felt in a pony ride over the cliffs of Malta, with some others of his mess, where falls were rife and tumbles frequent. These, I say, were first thoughts, but gradually others took their places. The enervation of a life of ease began soon to show itself, and he felt the power of a certain station. In the allowance his guardian made him, he had a far greater sum at his disposal than he ever possessed before; and in the title of his rank he soon discovered a magic that made the world beneath him very deferential and very obliging.

"That boy has been very ill brought up, Mr. Layton; it will be your chief care to instil into him proper notions of the place he is to occupy one of these days," said an old Earl, one of his guardians, and who was most eager that every trace of his sea life should be eradicated.

"Don't let him get spoiled, Layton, because he's a lord," said the other guardian, who was an old Admiral. "There's good stuff in the lad, and it would be a thousand pities it should be corrupted."

Layton did his best to obey each; but the task had its difficulties. As to the boy himself, the past and the present, the good and the evil, the frank young middy and the rich lordling, warred and contended in his nature; nor was it very certain at any moment which would ultimately gain the mastery. Such, without dwelling more minutely, was he who now strolled along through shrubbery and parterre, half listless as to the way, but very happy withal, and very light-hearted.

There was something in the scene that recalled England to his mind. There were more trees and turf than usually are found in Italian landscape, and there was, half hidden between hazel and alder, a clear, bright river, that brawled and fretted over rocks, or deepened into dark pools, alternately. How the circling eddies of a fast-flowing stream do appeal to young hearts! what music do they hear in the gushing waters! what a story is there in that silvery current as it courses along through waving meadows, or beneath tall mountains, and along some dark and narrow gorge, emblem of life

itself in its light and shade, its peaceful intervals and its hours of struggle and conflict.

Forcing his way through the brushwood that guarded the banks, the boy gained a little ledge of rock, against which the current swept with violence, and then careered onward over a shallow, gravelly bed till lost in another bend of the stream. Just as Agincourt reached the rock he spied a fishing-rod deeply and securely fastened in one of its fissures, but whose taper point was now bending like a whip, and springing violently under the struggling effort of a strong fish. He was nothing of an angler. Of honest "Izaak" and his gentle craft he absolutely knew nought, and of all the mysteries of hackles and green drakes he was utterly ignorant; but his sailor instinct could tell him when a spar was about to break, and this he now saw to be the case. The strain was great, and every jerk now threatened to snap either line or rod. He looked hurriedly around him for the fisherman, whose interests were in such grave peril; but seeing no one near, he endeavoured to withdraw the rod. While he thus struggled, for it was fastened with care, the efforts of the fish to escape became more and more violent, and at last, just as the boy had succeeded in his task, a strong spring from the fish snapped the rod near the tip, and at the same instant snatched it from the youth's hand into the stream. Without a second's hesitation, Agincourt dashed into the river, which rose nearly to his shoulders, and, after a vigorous pursuit, reached the rod, but only as the fish had broken the strong gut in two, and made his escape up the rapid current.

The boy was toilfully clambering up the bank, with the broken rod in his hand, when a somewhat angry summons in Italian met his ears. It was time enough, he thought, to look for the speaker when he had gained dry land, so he patiently fought his way upwards, and at last, out of breath and exhausted, threw himself full length in the deep grass of the bank.

"I believe I am indebted to you, sir, for my smashed tackle and the loss of a heavy fish besides?" said Charles Heathcote, as he came up to where the youth was lying, his voice and manner indicating the anger that moved him.

"I thought to have saved the rod and caught the fish too," said the other, half indolently; "but I only got a wet jacket for my pains."

"I rather suspect, young gentleman, you are more conversant with a measuring-yard than a salmon-rod," said

Heathcote, insolently, as he surveyed the damaged fragments of his tackle.

"What do you mean by that, sir?" cried the boy, springing with a bound to his feet, and advancing boldly towards his adversary.

"Simply that it's not exactly the sort of sport you follow in Bond Street," retorted Heathcote, whose head was full of "Mosely and Trip," and felt certain that a scion of that great house was before him.

"You must be a rare snob not to know a gentleman when you see him," said Agincourt, with an insolent defiance in his look.

"Perhaps I'd be a better judge if I saw him after a good washing," said Heathcote, who, with one hasty glance at the river, now turned a fierce eye on the youth.

Agincourt's gun-room experiences had not taught him to decline an offered battle, and he threw off his cap to show that he was ready and willing to accept the challenge, when suddenly Layton sprang between them, crying out, "What's the meaning of all this?"

"The meaning is, that your young friend there has taken the liberty, first, to smash my fishing gear, and then to be very insolent to me, and that I had very serious intentions of sending him to look for the one and pay forfeit for the other."

"Yes, I broke his rod, and I'll pay for it, or, if he's a gentleman, I'll beg his pardon, or fight him," said the boy, in a tone of ill-repressed anger.

"When there is an evident mistake somewhere," said Layton, gently, "it only needs a moment of forbearance to set it right."

"Here's how it all happened," broke in the boy, eagerly. And in a few words he related his chance arrival at the spot, how he had seen the rod in what he deemed imminent danger, and how, with the best intentions, he had interfered to save it.

"I beg you to accept all my excuses for what I have said to you," said Heathcote, with a frank and manly courtesy. "I am quite ashamed of my ill-temper, and hope you'll forgive it."

"To be sure I will. But what about the rod—you can't easily get such another in these parts?"

The boy looked eagerly at Layton as he spoke. Layton as quickly gave an admonitory glance of caution, and the youth's instinctive good breeding understood it.

"I think you came over with a party of friends to see the villa," said Heathcote, to relieve the awkward pause between them.

"Not friends, exactly; people of our hotel."

Heathcote smiled faintly, and rejoined:—

"Some of our pleasantest acquaintances come of chance intimacies—don't you think so?"

"Oh, for the matter of that, they're jolly enough. There's a wonderful Londoner, and a rare Yankee, and there's an Irishman would make the fortune of the Haymarket."

"You must own, Harry, they are all most kind and good-natured to you," said Layton, in a tone of mild half-rebuke.

"Well, ain't I just as—what shall I call it?—polite and the like to them? Ay, Layton, frown away as much as you like, they're a rum lot."

"It is young gentlemen of this age who, now-a-days, are most severe on the manners and habits of those they chance upon in a journey, not at all aware that, as the world is all new to them, their criticism may have for its object things of every-day frequency."

The youth looked somewhat vexed at this reproof, but said nothing.

"I have the same unlucky habit myself," said Heathcote, good-humouredly. "I pronounce upon people with wonderfully little knowledge of them, and no great experience of the world neither; and—case in point—your American acquaintance is exactly one of those I feel the very strongest antipathy to. We have met at least a dozen times during the winter and autumn, and the very thought of finding *him* in a place would decide *me* to leave it."

It was not Layton's business to correct what he deemed faulty in this sentiment, but in the sharp glance he threw towards his pupil, he seemed to convey his disapproval of it.

"'My Coach,' Mr. Layton, is dying to tell us both we are wrong, sir," said the boy; "he likes the 'kernal.'" And this he said with a nasal twang whose imitation was not to be mistaken.

Though Heathcote laughed at the boy's mimicry, his attention was more taken by the expression "my Coach," which not only revealed the relations of tutor and pupil between them, but showed, by its familiarity, that the youth stood in no great awe of his preceptor.

Perhaps Layton had no fancy for this liberty before a stranger; perhaps he felt ashamed of the position itself; perhaps he caught something in Heathcote's quick glance

A Cur-ish Saint

towards him—whatever it was, he was irritated and provoked, and angrily bit his lip, without uttering a word.

"Oh, here come the sight-seers! they are doing the grounds, and the grottos, and the marble fountains," cried the boy, as a large group came out from a flower-garden and took their way towards an orangery. As they issued forth, however, Mrs. Morris stopped to caress a very large St. Bernard dog, who lay chained at the foot of an oak-tree. Charles Heathcote had not time to warn her of her danger, when the animal sprang fiercely at her. Had she not fallen suddenly backward, she must have been fearfully mangled; as it was, she received a severe wound in the wrist, and, overcome by pain and terror together, sank fainting on the sward.

For some time the confusion was extreme. Some thought that the dog was at liberty, and fled away in terror across the park; others averred that he was—must be—mad, and his bite fatal; a few tried to be useful; but Quackinboss hurried to the river, and, filling his hat with water, sprinkled the cold face of the sufferer and washed the wound, carefully binding it up with his handkerchief in a quick, business-like way, that showed he was not new to such casualties.

Layton, meanwhile, took charge of the little girl, whose cries and screams were heartrending.

"What a regular day of misfortunes, this!" said Agincourt, as he followed the mournful procession while they carried the still fainting figure back to the house. "I fancy you'll not let another batch of sight-seers into your grounds in a hurry."

"The ill-luck has all befallen our guests," said Heathcote. "Our share of the mishap is to be associated with so much calamity."

All that care and kindness could provide waited on Mrs. Morris, as she was carried into the villa and laid on a bed. May Leslie took all upon herself, and while the doctor was sent for, used such remedies as she had near. It was at once decided that she should not be removed, and after some delay the company departed without her; the day that had dawned so pleasantly thus closing in gloom and sadness, and the party so bent on amusement returned homeward depressed and dispirited.

"They're mean vicious, these Alp dogs, and never to be trusted," said Quackinboss.

"Heroines will be heroines," said Mrs. Morgan, gruffly.

"Or rather won't be heroines when the occasion comes

for it. She fainted off like a school-girl," growled out Morgan.

"I should think she did!" muttered Mosely, "when she felt the beast's teeth in her."

"A regular day of misfortunes!" repeated Agincourt.

"And we lost the elegant fine luncheon, too, into the bargain," said O'Shea. "Every one seemed to think it wouldn't be genteel to eat after the disaster."

"It is the fate of pleasure parties," said Layton, moodily. And so they jogged on in silence.

And thus ended a day of pleasure, as many have ended before it.

Assuredly they who plan pic-nics are not animated by the spirit of an actuary. There is a marvellous lack of calculation in their composition, since, of all species of entertainment, there exists not one so much at the mercy of accident, so thoroughly dependent for success on everything going right. Like the Walcheren expedition, the "wind must not only blow from the right point, but with a certain graduated amount of force." What elements of sunshine and shade—what combinations of good spirits, and good temper, and good taste—what guidance, and what moderation—what genius of direction, and what "respect for minorities!" We will not enter upon the material sources of success, though, indeed, it should be owned they are generally better looked to, and more cared for, than the moral ingredients thus massed and commingled.

It was late when the party reached the Bagni, and wishing each other a half-cold good night, separated.

And now, one last peep at the villa, where we have left the sufferer. It was not until evening that the Heathcotes had so far recovered from the shock of the morning's disaster, and its consequences, as to be able to meet and talk over the events, and the actors in them.

"Well," said Sir William, as they all sat round the tea-table, "what do you say to my Yankee now? Of all that company, was there one that showed the same readiness in a difficulty, a quick-witted aptitude to do the right thing, and at the same time so unobtrusively and quietly, that when everything was over it was hard to say who had done it?"

"*I* call him charming. I'm in ecstasies with him," said May, whose exaggerations of praise or censure were usually unbounded.

"I'm quite ready to own he 'came out' strong in the confusion," said Charles, half unwillingly; "but it was just

the sort of incident that such a man was sure to figure well in."

"Show me the man who is active and ready-minded in his benevolence, and I'll show you one who has not to go far into his heart to search for generous motives. I maintain it, Quackinboss is a fine fellow!" There was almost a touch of anger in Sir William's voice as he said these words, as though he would regard any disparagement of the American as an offence to himself.

"I think Charley is a little jealous," said May, with a sly malice; "he evidently wanted to carry the wounded lady himself, when that great giant interposed, and, seizing the prize, walked away as though he were only carrying a baby."

"*I* fancied it was the tutor was disappointed," said Charles; "and the way he devoted his cares to the little girl, when deprived of the mamma, convinced me he was the party chiefly interested."

"Which was the tutor?" asked May, hastily. "You don't mean the man with all the velvet on his coat?"

"No, no; that was Mr. O'Shea, the Irish M.P., who, by the way, paid *you* the most persevering attention."

"A hateful creature, insufferably pretentious and impertinent! The tutor was, then, the pale young man in black?"

"A nice, modest fellow," broke in Sir William; "and a fine boy that young Marquis of Agincourt. I'm glad you asked him up here, Charles. He is to come on Tuesday, is he not?"

"Yes, I said Tuesday, because I can't get my tackle to rights before that; and I promised to make him a fly-fisher. I owe him the reparation."

"You included the tutor, of course, in your invitation?" asked his father.

"No. How stupid! I forgot him altogether."

"Oh! that was too bad," said May.

"Indeed," cried Charles, turning towards her with a look of such malicious significance that she blushed deeply, and averted her head.

"Let us invite them all up here for Tuesday, May," said Sir William. "It would be very unfair if they were to carry away only a disagreeable memory of this visit. Let us try and efface the first unhappy impression."

"All right," said Charles, "and I'll dash off a few lines to Mr. Layton, I think his name is, to say that we expect he will favour us with his company for a few days here. Am

I not generosity itself, May ? " said he, in a low whisper, as he passed behind her chair.

A blush still deeper than the first, and a look of offended pride, were her only answer.

" I must go in search of these good people's cards, for I forget some of their names," said Charles; " though I believe I remember the important ones."

This last sally was again directed towards May, but she, apparently, did not hear it.

" Who knows but your patient upstairs may be well enough to meet her friends, May," said Sir William.

" Perhaps so. I can't tell," answered she, vaguely, for she had but heard him imperfectly, and scarcely knew what she was replying.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MEMBER FOR INCHABOGUE.

Mr. O'Shea lay in his bed at the Bagni di Lucca. It was late in the afternoon, and he had not yet risen, being one of those who deem, to travesty the poet,—

> That the best of all ways,
> To shorten our days,
> Is to add a few hours to the night, my dear.

In other words, he was ineffably bored and wearied, sick of the place, the people, and himself, and only wearing over the time as one might do the stated term of an imprisonment. His agent—Mr. Mahony, the celebrated Mr. Miles Mahony, who was agent for all the Irish gentlemen of Mr. O'Shea's politics, and who had either estates very much encumbered, or no estates at all—had written him that letter, which might be stereotyped in every agent's office, and sent off indiscriminately by post, at due intervals, to any of the clients, for there was the same bead-roll of mishaps and calamities Ireland has been suffering under for centuries. Take any traveller or guide-book experience of the land, and it is a record of rain that never ceased. The Deluge was a

passing April shower compared to the national climate. Ask any proprietor, however, more especially if a farmer, and he would tell you, "We're ruined, entirely ruined, with the drought"—perhaps he'd have called it "druth." "If the rain doesn't fall before twenty-four hours, there will be no potatoes, no grass, no straw, the wheat won't fill, the cattle will be destroyed," and so on; just as if the whole population was not soaked through like a wet sponge, and the earth a sludge of mud and swamp, to which Holland seems a sand-bank in comparison! Then came the runaway tenants, only varied by those who couldn't be induced to "run," on any terms. There was the usual "agrarian outrage," with the increased police force quartered on the barony in consequence, and perhaps a threat of a special commission, with more expense besides. There was the extract of the judge's charge, saying that he never remembered so "heavy a calendar," the whole winding up with an urgent appeal to send over ten or twenty pounds to repair the chapel, or the priest's house, or contribute to some local object, "at your indifference to which there is very great discontent at this moment."

A pleasant postscript also mentioned that a dissolution of Parliament was daily expected, and that it would be well you'd "come home and look after the borough, where the Tories were working night and day to increase their influence."

"Bad luck to them for Tories!" muttered he, as he threw the crumpled document from him. "I'd have been well off to-day if it wasn't for them. There's no telling the money the contested elections cost me, while, to make out that I was a patriot, I couldn't take a place, but had to go on voting and voting out of the purity of my motives. It was an evil hour when I took to politics at all. Joe! Joe!" cried he aloud, following up the appeal with a shrill whistle.

"Tear and ages, sure the house isn't on fire!" said a man, rushing into the room with an air and manner that little indicated the respect due from a servant to his master; "not to say," added he, "that it's not dacent or becomin' to whistle after me, as if I was a tarrier or a bull-dog."

"Hold your prate, will you?" said Mr. O'Shea.

"Why would I? 'Tis humiliated I am before all in the place."

"Will you hold your prate?" muttered his master, in a deeper tone, while, stretching forth his hand, he seemed in search of any missile to hurl at his mutinous follower.

"If I do, then, it's undher protest, mind that. I put it on record that I'm only yieldin' to the 'vis magiory.'"

"What o'clock is it?" yawned out O'Shea.

"It wants a trifle of four o'clock."

"And the day—what's it like?"

"Blazin' hot—hotter than yesterday—'hotter than New Orleens,' Mr. Quackinbosh says."

"D—n Mr. Quackinbosh, and New Orlēēns too!" growled out O'Shea.

"With all my heart. He's always laughing at what he calls *my* Irish, as if it wasn't better than *his* English."

"Any strangers arrived?"

"Devil a one. Ould Pagnini says he'll be ruined entirely—there never was such a set, he says, in the house before—nothing called for but the reg'lar meals, and no wine but the drink of the country, that isn't wine at all."

"He's an insolent scoundrel!"

"He is not. He is the dacentest man I seen since I come to Italy."

"Will you hold your prate, or do you want me to kick you down stairs?"

"I do not!" said he, with a stern doggedness that was almost comic.

"Did you order breakfast?"

"I did, when I heard you screech out. 'There he is,' said ould Pan; 'I wish he'd be in the same hurry to call for his bill.'"

"Insolent rascal! Did you blacken his eye?"

"I did not."

"What did you do, then?"

"I did nothing."

"What did you say? You're ready enough with a bad tongue when it's not called for—what did you say?"

"I said people called for their bills when they were lavin' a house, and too lucky you'll be, says I, if he pays it when he calls for it."

This seemed too much for Mr. O'Shea's endurance, for he sprang out of bed and hurled a heavy old olive-wood inkstand at his follower. Joe, apparently habituated to such projectiles, speedily ducked his head, and the missile struck the frame of an old looking-glass, and carried away a much-ornamented but very frail chandelier at its side.

"There's more of it," said Joe. "Damage to furniture in settin'-room, forty-six pauls and a half." With this sage reflection, he pushed the fragments aside with his foot, and then, turning to the door, he took from the hands of a waiter

the tray containing his master's breakfast, arranging it deliberately before him with the most unbroken tranquillity of demeanour.

"Didn't you say it was chocolate I'd have instead of coffee?" said O'Shea, angrily.

"I did not; they grumble enough about sending up anything, and I wasn't goin' to provoke them," said Joe, calmly.

"No letters, I suppose, but this?"

"Sorra one."

"What's going on below?" asked he, in a more lively tone, as though dismissing an unpleasant theme. "Any one come —anything doing?"

"Nothing; they're all off to that villa to spend the day, and not to be back till late at night."

"Stupid fun, after all; the road is roasting, and the place, when you get there, not worth the trouble; but they're so proud of visiting a baronet, that's the whole secret of it, those vulgar Morgans and that Yankee fellow."

These mutterings he continued while he went on dressing, and though not intended to be addressed to Joe, he was in nowise disconcerted when that free-and-easy individual replied to them.

"'Your master's not coming with us, I believe,' said Mrs. Morgan to me. 'I'm sure, however, there must have been a mistake. It's so strange that he got no invitation.'

"'But he did, ma'am,' says I; 'he got a card like the rest.'"

"Well done, Joe; a lie never choked you. Go on," cried O'Shea, laughing.

"'But you see, ma'am,' says I, 'my master never goes anywhere in that kind of promiscuous way. He expects to be called on and trated with "differince," as becomes a member of Parliament——'

"'For Ireland?' says she.

"'Yes, ma'am,' says I. 'We haven't as many goats there as in other parts I'm tould of, nor the females don't ride straddle legs, with men's hats on thim.'"

"You didn't say that?" burst in O'Shea, with a mock severity.

"I did, and more—a great deal more. What business was it of hers that you were not asked to the pic-nic? What had she to say to it? Why did she follow me down the street the other morning, and stay watching all the time I was in at the banker's, and though, when I came out, I made believe I was stuffin' the bank-notes into my pocket, I saw by the impudent laugh on her face that she knew I got nothing?"

"By the way, you never told me what Twist and Trover said."

"I did."

"Well, what was it? Tell it again," said O'Shea, angrily.

"Mr. Trover said, 'Of course, whatever your master wants, just step in there and show it to Mr. Twist;' and Mr. Twist said, 'Are you here again,' says he, 'after the warnin' I gave you? Go back and tell your master 'tis takin' up his two last bills he ought to be, instead of passin' more.'

"'Mr. Trover, sir,' says I, 'sent me in.'

"'Well, Mr. Twist sent you out again,' says he, 'and there's your answer.'

"'Short and sweet,' says I, goin' out, and pretending to be putting up the notes as I went."

"Did you go down to the other fellow's—Macapes?"

"I did; but as he seen me coming out of the other place, he only ballyragged me, and said, 'We only discount for them as has letters of credit on us.'

"'Well,' says I, 'but who knows that they're not coming in the post now?'

"'We'll wait till we see them,' says he.

"'By my conscience,' says I, 'I hope you'll not eat your breakfast till they come.' And so I walked away. Oh, dear! isn't it a suspicious world?"

"It's a rascally world!" broke out O'Shea, with bitterness.

"It is!" assented Joe, with a positive energy there was no gainsaying.

"Is Mr. Layton gone with the rest this morning?"

"He is, and the Marquis. They're a-horseback on two ponies not worth fifty shilling apiece."

"And that counter-jumper, Mosely, I'll wager he, too, thinks himself first favourite for the heiress."

"Well, then, in the name of all that's lucky, why don't you thry your own chance?" said Joe, coaxingly.

"Isn't it because I *did* try that they have left me out of this invitation? Isn't it because they saw I was like to be the winning horse that they scratched me out of the race? Isn't it just because Gorman O'Shea was the man to carry off the prize that they wouldn't let me enter the lists?"

"There's only two more as rich as her in all England," chimed in Joe, "and one of them will never marry any but the Emperor of Roosia."

"She has money enough!" muttered O'Shea.

"And neither father nor mother, brother, sister, kith or kin," continued Joe, in a tone of exultation that seemed to

say he knew of no such good luck in life as to stand alone and friendless in the world.

"Those Heathcotes are related to her."

"No more than they are to you. I have it all from Miss Smithers, the maid. 'We're as free as air, Mr. Rouse,' says she; 'wherever we have a "conceit," we can follow it.' That's plain talking, anyhow."

"Would you marry Smithers, Joe?" said his master, with a roguish twinkle in his eye.

"Maybe, if I knew for what; though, by my conscience, she's no beauty!"

"I meant, of course, for a good consideration."

"Not on a bill, though—money down—hard money."

"And how much of it?" asked O'Shea, with a knowing look.

"The price of that place at Kinsale."

"The 'Trout and Triangle,' Joe?" laughed out his master. "Are you still yearning after being an innkeeper in your native town?"

"I am just that," replied Joe, solemnly. "'Tis what I'd rather be than Lord Mayor of Dublin!"

"Well, it is an honourable ambition, no doubt of it. Nothing can be more reasonable, besides, than a man's desire to fill that station in life which, to his boyish ideas, seemed high and enviable." This speech Mr. O'Shea delivered in a tone by which he occasionally turned to rehearse oratorical effects, and which, by some strange sympathy, always appeared to please his follower. "Yes, Joe," continued he, "as the poet says, 'The child is father of the man.'"

"You mane the man is father of the child," broke in Joe.

"I do not, booby; I meant what I have said, and what Wordsworth said before me."

"The more fool he, then. It's nobody's father he'd be. Arrah! that's the way you always spoil a fine sintiment with something out of a poet. Poets and play-actors never helped a man out of a ditch!"

"Will you marry this Smithers, if that be her name?" said O'Shea, angrily.

"For the place——"

"I mean as much."

"I would, if I was treated—'raysonable,'" said he, pausing for a moment in search of the precise word he wanted.

Mr. O'Shea sighed heavily; his exchequer contained nothing but promises; and none knew better than his follower what such pledges were worth.

"It would be the making of *you*, Joe," said he, after a brief silence, "if I was to marry this heiress."

"Indeed it might be," responded the other.

"It would be the grand event of *your* life, that's what it would be. What could I not do for you? You might be land-steward—you might be under-agent, bailiff, driver—eh?"

"Yes," said Joe, closing his eyes, as if he desired to relish the vision undisturbed by external distractions.

"I have always treated you as a sort of friend, Joe—you know that."

"I do, sir. I do, indeed."

"And I mean to prove myself your friend, too. It is not the man who has stuck faithfully by me that I'd desert. Where's my dressing-gown?"

"She was torn under the arm, and I gave her to be mended; put this round you," said he, draping a much befrogged pelisse over his master's shoulders.

"These are not my slippers, you stupid ass!"

"They are the ould ones. Don't you remember shying one of the others, yesterday, at the organ-boy, and it fell in the river and was lost?"

Mr. O'Shea's brow darkened as he sat down to his meal. "Tell Pan," said he, "to send me up some broth and a chop about seven. I must keep the house to-day, and be indisposed. And do you go over to Lucca, and raise me a few Naps. on my 'rose-amethyst' ring. Three will do—five would be better, though."

Joe sighed. It was a mission he had so often been charged with and never came well out of, since his master would invariably insist on hearing every step of the negotiation, and as unfailingly revenged upon his envoy all the impertinences to which the treaty gave rise.

"Don't come back with any insolent balderdash about the stone being false, or having a flaw in it. Holditch values it at two hundred and thirty pounds; and, if it wasn't a family ring, I'd have taken the money. And, mind you, don't be talking about whose it is—it's a gentleman waiting for his letters——"

"Sure I know," burst in Joe; "his remittances, that ought to be here every day."

"Just so: and that merely requires a few Naps——"

"To pay his cigars——"

"There's no need of more explanation. Away with you; and tell Bruno I'll want a saddle-horse to-morrow, to be here at the door by two o'clock."

Joe took his departure, and Mr. O'Shea was left to his own meditations.

It may seem a small cause for depression of spirits, but, in truth, it was always a day of deep humiliation to Mr. O'Shea when his necessities compelled him to separate himself from that cherished relic, his great-grandmother's ring. It had been reserved in his family, as a sort of charm, for generations; his grand-uncle Luke had married on the strength of it; his own father had flashed it in the eyes of Bath and Cheltenham, for many a winter, with great success; and he himself had so significantly pointed out incorrect items in his hotel bills, with the forefinger that bore it, that landlords had never pressed for payment, but gone away heart-full of the man who owned such splendour.

It would be a curious subject to inquire how many men have owed their distinction or success in life to some small adjunct, some adventitious appendage of this kind; a horse, a picture, a rare bronze, a statue, a curious manuscript, a fragment of old armour, have made their owners famous, when they have had the craft to merge their identity in the more absorbing interest of the wondrous treasure. And thus, the man that owns the winner of the Derby, a great cup carved by Cellini, or a chef-d'œuvre of Claude or Turner, may repose upon the fame of his possession, identified as he is with so much greatness. Oh! ye possessors of show places, handsome wives, rare gardens, or costly gems, in what borrowed bravery do ye meet the world! Not that in this happy category Mr. O'Shea had his niche; no, he was only the owner of a ring—a rose-amethyst ring—whose purity was perhaps not more above suspicion than his own. And yet it had done him marvellous service on more than one occasion. It had astonished the bathers at St. Leonard, and dazzled the dinner company at Tunbridge Wells; Harrogate had winked under it, and Malvern gazed at it with awe; and society, so to say, was divided into those who knew the man from the ring, and those who knew the ring from the man.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. PENTHONY MORRIS.

Our reader has been told how Mrs. Penthony Morris stormed the Villa Caprini, established herself, child, maid, and Skye terrier within its walls, and became, ere many days went over, a sort of influence in the place. It is not in chemistry alone that a single ingredient, minute and scarce perceptible, can change the property and alter all the quality of the mass with which it is mingled. Human nature exhibits phenomena precisely alike, and certain individuals possess the marvellous power of tinging the world they mix in, with their own hue and colour, and flavouring society with sweet or bitter, as temper induces them. The first and most essential quality of such persons is a rapid—an actually instinctive—appreciation of the characters they meet, even passingly, in the world's intercourse. They have not to spell out temperaments slowly and laboriously. To them men's natures are not written in phonetic signs or dark symbols, but in letters large and legible. They see, salute, speak with you, and they understand you. Not, perhaps, as old friends know you, with reference to this or that minute trick of mind or temper, but, with a far wider range of your character than even old friends have taken, they know your likes and dislikes, the things you fear and hope, the weak points you would fortify, and sometimes the strong ones you would mask—in a word, for all the purposes of intercourse, they are able to estimate your strength and weakness, and all this ere, perhaps, you have noted the accents of their voice or the colour of their eyes.

The lady of whom it is now our business to speak was one of this gifted class. Whence she came, and how she became such, we are not about to enter upon. She had had her share of trials, and yet was both young and good-looking; her good looks in nowise evidencing the vestiges of any sorrow. Whether a widowed or deserted wife, she bore bereavement admirably; indeed, so far as one could see, she professed a very rare ethical philosophy. Her theory was, the world was a very nice world, the people

in it very nice people; life itself a very nice thing; and that people, generally speaking, only needed their own consent to be very happy and contented. She had, it is true, some very able adjuncts to carry out her system. There was scarcely an acquirement that she did not possess reasonably well; she spoke several languages, sang, rode, drew, played billiards most gracefully, and could manufacture the most charming cigarettes that ever were smoked. Some of these are envied qualities, and suggest envy; but against this she was careful to guard, and this by a very simple method indeed. In whatever she did, tried, or attempted, she always asked your advice. She had carefully studied the effect of the imputed superiority of those who counsel their neighbours, and she saw in its working one of the most tangible of all human weaknesses. The tendency to guide and direct others is a very popular one. Generous people practise it out of their generosity; gentle natures indulge in the practice in very sympathy. To stern moralists it is an occasion for the hard lessons they love to inculcate. The young are pleased with its importance, the old are gratified to exercise their just prerogative. "Tell me how do you do this;" or, "Teach me how to correct that;" "What would you advise in *my* place?" or, "What reply would you give to that?" are appeals that involve a very subtle flattery. Every man, and more decisively, too, every woman, likes to be deemed shrewd and worldly-wise. Now, Mrs. Morris had reflected deeply over this trait, and saw to what good account care and watchfulness might turn it. He who seeks to be guided by another makes his appeal in a guise of humility, besides, which is always a flattery, and when this is done artfully, with every aid from good looks and a graceful manner, success is rarely wanting; and lastly, it is the only form of selfishness the world neither resents nor repudiates.

He who comes to you with a perfectly finished tale of his misfortunes, with "Finis" written on the last volume of his woes, is simply a bore; whereas he who approaches you while the catastrophe yet hangs impending, has always an interest attached to him. He may marry the heiress yet, he may be arrested on that charge of forgery, obtain that Cross of the Bath, or be shot in that duel; you are at least talking to a man Fortune has not done with, and this much is something.

Mrs. Morris had been little more than a fortnight domesticated at the Villa Caprini, where her weakness still detained her, and yet she had contrived to consult Sir William about

her fortune, invested, almost entirely, in "Peruvians," which her agent, Mr. Halker, had told her were "excellent;" but whether the people of that name, or the country, or the celebrated Bark, was the subject of the investment, she really professed not to know.

To May Leslie she had confided the great secret of her heart—an unpublished novel; a story mainly comprised of the sad events of her own life, and the propriety of giving which to the world was the disputed question of her existence.

As to Charles, she had consulted him how best to disembarrass herself of the attentions of Mr. Mosely, who was really become a persecutor. She owned that in asking his counsel she could not impart to him all the circumstances which he had a right to be possessed of—she appealed to his delicacy not to question her. So that whether wife or widow, he knew not what she might be, and, in fact, she even made of the obscurity another subject of his interest, and so involved him in her story that he could think of nothing else. She managed each of these confidences with such consummate skill, that each believed himself her one sole trusted friend, depositary of her cares, refuge of her sorrows; and while thus insinuating herself into a share of their sympathy she displayed, as though by mere accident, many of her attractions, and gave herself an opportunity of showing how interesting she was in her sorrow, and how fascinating in her joy!

The Heathcotes—father, son, and niece—were possessed of a very ample share of the goods of fortune. They had health, wealth, freedom to live where and how they liked. They were well disposed towards each other and towards the world; inclined to enjoy life, and suited to its enjoyment. But, somehow, pretty much like some mass of complicated machinery, which by default of some small piece of mechanism—a spring, a screw, or a pinion the more—stands idle and inert—all its force useless, all its power unused, they had no pursuit—did nothing. Mrs. Morris was exactly the motive power wanting, and by her agency interests sprang up, occupations were created, pleasures invented. Without bustle, without even excitement, the dull routine of the day grew animate; the hours sped glibly along. Little Clara, too, was no small aid to this change. In the quiet monotony of a grave household a child's influence is magical. As the sight of a butterfly out at sea brings up thoughts of shady alleys and woodbine-covered windows, of "the grass and the flowers among the grass," so will a child's light step and merry voice throw a whole flood of sunny associations over the sad-coloured

quietude of some old house. Clara was every one's companion and everywhere—with Charles as he fished, with May Leslie in the flower-garden, with old Sir William in the orangery, or looking over pictures beside him in the long-galleried library.

Mrs. Morris herself was yet too great an invalid for an active life. Her chair would be wheeled out into the lawn, under the shade of an immense weeping ash, and there, during the day, as to some "general staff," came all the "reports" of what was doing each morning. Newspapers and books would be littered about her, and even letters brought her to read, from dear friends, with whose names conversation had made her familiar. A portion of time was, however, reserved for Clara's lessons, which no plan or project was ever suffered to invade.

It may seem a somewhat dreary invitation if we ask our readers to assist at one of these mornings. Pinnock and Mrs. Barbauld, and Mangnall are, perhaps, not the company to their taste, nor will they care to cast up multiplications, or stumble through the blotted French exercise. Well, we can only pledge ourselves not to exaggerate the infliction of these evils. And now to our task. It is about eleven o'clock of a fine summer's day, in Italy; Mrs. Morris sits at her embroidery-frame, under the long-branched willow; Clara, at a table near, is drawing, her long silky curls falling over the paper, and even interfering with her work, as is shown by an impatient toss of her head, or even a hastier gesture, as with her hands she flings them back upon her neck.

"It was to Charley I said it, mamma," said she, without lifting her head, and went on with her work.

"Have I not told you, already, to call him Mr. Charles Heathcote, or Mr. Heathcote, Clara?"

"But he says he won't have it."

"What an expression—'won't have it!'"

"Well, I know," cried she, with impatience; and then laughingly said, "I've forgot, in a hurry, old dear Lindley Murray."

"I beg of you to give up that vile trash of doggerel rhyme. And now what was it you said to Mr. Heathcote?"

"I told him that I was an only child, 'a violet on a grassy bank, in sweetness all alone,' as the little book says."

"And then he asked about your papa; if you remembered him?"

"No, mamma."

"He made some mention, some allusion to papa?"

"Only a little sly remark of how fond he must be of *me*, or *I* of *him*."

"And what did you answer?"

"I only wiped my eyes, mamma; and then he seemed so sorry to have given me pain, that he spoke of something else. Like Sir Guyon,—

> "'He talked of roses, lilies, and the rest,
> The shady alley, and the upland swelling;
> Wondered what notes birds warbled in their nest,
> What tales the rippling river then was telling.'"

"And then you left him, and came away?" said her mother.

"Yes, mamma. I said it was my lesson time, and that you were so exact and so punctual that I did not dare to be late."

"Was it then he asked if mamma had always been your governess, Clara?"

"No; it was May that asked that question. May Leslie has a very pretty way of pumping, mamma, though you'd not suspect it. She begins with the usual 'Are you very fond of Italy?' or 'Don't you prefer England?' and then 'What part of England?'"

Mrs. Morris bit her lip, and coloured slightly; and then, laying her work on her lap, stared steadfastly at the girl, still deeply intent on her drawing.

"I like them to begin that way," continued Clara. "It costs no trouble to answer such bungling questions; and whenever they push me closer, I've an infallible method, mamma—it never fails."

"What's that?" asked her mother, dryly.

"I just say, as innocently as possible, 'I'll run and ask mamma; I'm certain she'll be delighted to tell you.' And then, if you only saw the shame and confusion they get into, saying, 'On no account, Clara dearest. I had no object in asking. It was mere idle talking,' and so on. Oh dear! what humiliation all their curiosity costs them."

"You try to be too shrewd, too cunning, Miss Clara," said her mother, rebukingly. "It is a knife that often cuts with the handle. Be satisfied with discovering people's intentions, and don't plume yourself about the cleverness of finding them out, or else, Clara"—and here she spoke more slowly—"or else, Clara, they will find *you* out too."

"Oh, surely not, while I continue the thoughtless, guileless little child mamma has made me," said she. And the tears

rose to her eyes, with an expression of mingled anger and sorrow it was sad to see in one so young.

"Clara!" cried her mother, in a voice of angry meaning; and then, suddenly checking herself, she said, in a lower tone, "let there be none of this."

"Sir William asked me how old I was, mamma."

"And you said——?"

"I believed twelve. Is it twelve? I ought to know, mamma, something for certain, for I was eleven two years ago, and then I have been ten since that; and when I was your sister, at Brighton, I was thirteen."

"Do you dare——" But ere she said more the child had buried her head between her hands, and, by the convulsive motion of her shoulders, showed that she was sobbing bitterly. The mother continued her work, unmoved by this emotion. She took occasion, it is true, when lifting up the ball of worsted which had fallen, to glance furtively towards the child; but, except by this, bestowed no other notice on her.

"Well," cried the little girl, with a half wild laugh, as she flung back her yellow hair, "Anderson says,—

> "'On joy comes grief—on mirth comes sorrow;
> We laugh to-day, that we may cry to-morrow.'

And I believe one is just as pleasant as the other—eh, mamma? *You* ought to know."

"This is one of your naughty days, Clara, and I had hoped we had seen the last of them," said her mother, in a grave, but not severe, tone.

"The naughty days are much more like to see the last of *me*," said the child, half aloud, and with a heavy sigh.

"Clara," said her mother, in the same calm, quiet voice, "I have made you my friend and my confidante, at an age when any other had treated you with strict discipline and reserve. You have been taught to see life—as my sad experience revealed it to me, too—too late."

"And for me, too—too soon!" burst in the child, passionately.

"Here's poor Clara breaking her heart over her exercise," burst in Sir William, as he came forward, and, stooping over the child, kissed her twice on the forehead. "Do let me have a favour to-day, and let this be a holiday."

"Oh yes, by all means," cried she, eagerly, clapping her hands.

"The lizard can lie in the sun, and bask
'Mid the odour of fragrant herbs;
Little knows he of a wearisome task,
Or the French irregular verbs.

The cicala, too, in the long deep grass,
All day sings happily,
And I'd venture to swear
He has never a care
For the odious rule of three.

"And as for the bee,
And his industry——"

"Oh, what a rhyme!" laughed in Mrs. Morris.
"Oh, let her go on," cried Sir William. "Go on, Clara."

"And as for the bee,
And his industry,
I distrust his toilsome hours,
For he roves up and down,
Like a 'man upon town,'
With a natural taste for flowers.

There, mamma, no more—not another the whole day long, I promise you," cried she, as she threw her arms around her neck and kissed her affectionately.

"Oh, these doggerel rhymes
Are like nursery chimes,
That sang us to sleep long ago.

I declare I'm forgetting already, so I'll go and look for Charley, and help him to tie greendrakes, and the rest of them."

"What a strange child!" said Sir William, as he looked fondly after her as she fled across the lawn.

"I have never seen her so thoroughly happy before," said Mrs. Morris, with a faint sigh. "This lovely place, these delicious gardens, these charming old woods, the villa itself, so full of objects of interest, have made up a sort of fairy-tale existence for her which is positive enchantment. It is indeed high time we should tear ourselves away from fascinations which will leave all life afterwards a very dull affair."

"Oh, that day is very distant, I should hope," said he, with sincere cordiality; "indeed, my ward and myself were, this very morning, plotting by what pretext, by what skilful devices, we could induce you to spend your autumn with us."

Mrs. Morris covered her face, as if to conceal her emotion

but a faint sob was still audible from beneath her handkerchief. "Oh!" cried she, in a faint and broken voice, "if you but knew in what a wounded heart you have poured this balm!—if I could tell—what I cannot tell you—at least, not yet—— No, no, Sir William, we must leave this. I have already written to my agent about letters for Alexandria and Cairo. You know," she added, with a sad smile, "the doctors have sentenced me to Egypt for the winter."

"These fellows are mere alarmists. Italy is the best climate in the world, or, rather, it has all the climates in the world; besides, I have some wonderful counsel to give you about your bonds. I intend that Miss Clara shall be the great heiress of her day. At all events, you shall settle it with May." And so, with that dread of a scene, a sort of terror about everything emotional—not very unnatural in gentlemen of a certain time of life, and with strong sanguineous temperaments—Sir William hurried away and left her to her own reflections.

Thus alone, Mrs. Morris took a letter from her pocket, and began to read it. Apparently the document had been perused by her before, for she passed hastily over the first page, scarcely skimming the lines with her eye. It was as if to give increased opportunity for judgment on the contents that she muttered the words as she read them. They ran thus:—

"A month or six weeks back our proposal might have been accepted, so at least Collier thinks; but he is now in funds, has money in abundance, and *you* know *what* he is at such moments. When Collier went to him at his lodgings in King Street, he found him in high spirits, boasting that he occupied the old quarters of the French Emperor—that he had even succeeded to his arm-chair and his writing-table. 'A splendid augury, Tom,' said he, laughing. 'Who knows but I, too, shall be "restored" one of these days?' After some bantering he stopped suddenly, and said, 'By the way, what the devil brings you here? Isn't it something about Loo? They say you want to marry her yourself, Collier,—is that true?' Not heeding C.'s denial, given in all solemnity, he went on to show that you could be no possible use to Collier—that he himself could utilize your abilities, and give your talents a fitting sphere; whereas in Collier's set you would be utterly lost. C. said it was as good as a play to hear his talk of all the fine things you might have done, and might yet do, in concert. 'Then there's Clara, too,' cried he, again; 'she'll make the greatest hit of our day. She can

come out for a season at the Haymarket, and she can marry whoever she likes.' Once in this vein, it was very hard to bring him back to anything like a bargain. Indeed, Collier says he wouldn't hear of any but immense terms—ridiculed the notion of your wanting to be free, for mere freedom's sake, and jocularly said, 'Tell me frankly, whom does *she* want to marry? or who wants to marry *her?* I'm not an unreasonable fellow if I'm treated on "the square."' Collier assured him that you only desired liberty, that you might take your own road in life. 'Then let her take it, by all means,' cried he. 'I am not molesting her—never have molested her, even when she went so far as to call herself by another name; she needn't cry out before she's hurt;' and so on. C. at last brought him to distinct terms, and he said, 'She shall cut the painter for five thousand; she's worth to me every guinea of it, and I'll not take less.' Of course, Collier said these were impossible conditions; and then they talked away about other matters. You know his boastful way, and how little reliance can be laid on any statement he makes; but certain it is, Collier came away fully impressed with the flourishing condition of his present fortune, his intimacy with great people, and his actual influence with men in power. That this is not entirely fabulous I have just received a most disagreeable proof. When Collier rose to go away, he said, 'By the way, you occasionally see Nick Holmes; well, just give him a hint to set his house in order, for they are going to stop payment of that Irish pension of his. It appears, from some correspondence of Lord Cornwallis that has just turned up, Nick's pension was to be continued for a stated term of years, and that he has been in receipt of it for the last six years without any right whatever. It is very hard on Nick,' said he, 'seeing that he sold himself to the devil, not at least to be his own master in this world. I'm sorry for the old dog on family grounds, for he is at least one of my father-in-laws.' I quote his words as Collier gave them, and to-day I have received a Treasury order to forward to the Lords a copy of the letter or warrant under which I received my pension. I mean simply to refer them to my evidence on Shehan's trial, where my testimony hanged both father and son. If this incident shows nothing else, it demonstrates the amount of information he has of what is doing or to be done in Downing Street. As to the pension, I'm not much afraid; my revelations of 1808 would be worse than the cost of me in the budget.

"If I find that nothing can be done with Ludlow, I don't

think I shall remain here longer, and the chances are that I shall take a run as far as Baden, and who says not over the Alps after? Don't be frightened, dear Loo, we shall meet at the same *table d'hôte*, drink at the same public spring, bet on the same card at *rouge-et-noir*, and I will never betray either of us. Of your Heathcotes I can learn next to nothing. There was a baronet of the name who ruined himself by searches after a title—an earldom, I believe—and railroad speculations, but he died, or is supposed to have died, abroad. At all events, your present owners of the name keep a good house, and treat you handsomely, so that there can be no great mistake in knowing them. Sufficient for the day is the evil—as the old saying is; and it is a wise one, if we understood how to apply it.

"I have been twice with Hadson and Reames, but there is nothing to be done. They say that the town does not care for a wife's book against her husband; they have the whole story better told, and on oath, in the Divorce Court. A really slashing volume of a husband against his wife might, however, take; he could say a number of things would amuse the public, and have a large sympathy with him. These are Hadson's or Reames's words, I don't know which, for they always talk together. How odd that *you* should have thought of the ballet for Clara just as I had suggested it! Of course, till free of Ludlow, it is out of the question. I am sorry to seal and send off such a disagreeable letter, dear Louisa, but who knows the sad exigencies of this weary world better than your affectionate father, N. Holmes.

"I accidentally heard yesterday that there was actually a Mrs. Penthony Morris travelling somewhere in Switzerland. Washington Irving, I believe, once chanced upon a living Ichabod Crane, when he had flattered himself that the name was his own invention. The complication in the present case might be embarrassing. So bear it in mind."

"Tant pis pour elle, whoever the other Mrs. Morris may be," said she, laughing, as she folded up the letter, and half mechanically regarded the seal. "You ought to change your crest, respectable father mine," muttered she; "the wags might say that your portcullis was a gallows." And then, with a weary sigh, she closed her eyes, and fell a-thinking.

That quiet, tranquil, even-tempered category of mankind, whose present has few casualties, and whose future is, so far

as human foresight can extend, assured to them, can form not the slightest conception of the mingled pleasure and pain that chequer the life of "the adventurer." The man who consents to gamble existence, has all the violent ecstasies of joy and grief that wait on changeful fortunes. "Shall I hit upon the right number this time? Will red win once more? Is the run of luck good or ill, or, it may be, exhausted?" These are questions ever rising to his mind, and what contrivance, what preparation, what spirit of exigency do they evoke! Theirs is a hand-to-hand conflict with Fate—they can subsidize no legions, skulk behind no parapets—in open field must the war be carried on; and what a cruel war it becomes when every wound festers into a crime!

This young and pretty woman, on whose fair features not a painful line was traced, and whose beautifully chiselled mouth smiled with a semblance of inward peace, was just then revolving thoughts little flattering to humanity generally. She had, all young as she was, arrived at the ungracious conclusion, that what are called the good are mere dupes, and that every step in life's ladder only lifts us higher and higher out of the realm of kindly sympathies and affections. Reading the great moralist in a version of their own, such people deem all virtue "vanity," and the struggles and sacrifices it entails "vexation of spirit." Let us frankly own that Mrs. Morris did not lose herself in any world of abstractions; she was eminently practical, and would no more have thrown away her time in speculations on humanity generally than would a whist-player, in the crisis of the odd trick, have suffered his mind to wander away to the manufactory where the cards were made, and the lives and habits of those who made them.

And now she had to think over Sir William, of whom she was half afraid; of Charles, whom she but half liked; and of May, whom she half envied. There were none of them very deep or difficult to read, but she had seen enough of life to know that many people, like fairy tales, are simple in perusal, but contain some subtle maxim, some cunning truth, in their moral. Were these of this order? She could not yet determine; how, therefore, should we? And so we leave her.

CHAPTER VIII.

PORT-NA-WHAPPLE.

Although time has not advanced, nor any change of season occurred to tinge the landscape with colder hues, we are obliged to ask our reader's company to a scene as unlike the sunny land we have been sojourning in as possible. It is a little bay on the extreme north coast of Ireland, closely land-locked by rugged cliffs, whose basalt formation indicate a sort of half-brotherhood with the famed Causeway. Seen from the tall precipices above, on a summer's day, when a vertical sunlight would have fallen on the strip of yellow crescent-like beach along which white-crested waves slowly came and went, the spot was singularly beautiful, and the one long, low, white cottage which faced the sea would have seemed a most enviable abode, so peaceful, so calm it looked. Closely girt in on three sides by rocky cliffs, whose wild, fantastic outlines presented every imaginable form, now rising in graceful pinnacles and minarets, now, standing out in all the stern majesty of some massive fortress or donjon keep, some blue and purple heaths might be seen clothing the little shelves of rock, and, wherever a deeper cleft occurred, some tall, broad-leaved ferns; but, except these, no other vegetation was to be met with. Indeed, the country for miles around displayed little else than the arid yellowish grass that springs from light sandy soil, the scant pasturage of mountain sheep. Directly in front of the bay, and with a distinctness occasionally startling, might be seen rising up from the sea a mass of stately cliffs, which seemed like a reflection of the Causeway. This was Staffa, something more than thirty odd miles off, but which, in the thin atmosphere of a calm day, might easily be traced out from the little cove of Port-na-Whapple.

Port-na-Whapple had once been a noted spot amongst fishermen; the largest "takes" of salmon—and of the finest fish on the coast—had been made there. For three or four weeks in the early autumn the little bay was the scene of a most vigorous activity, the beach covered with rude huts of branches and boat canvas, the strand crowded with people, all busily engaged salting, drying, or packing the fish; boats

launching, or standing in, deep-laden with their speckled freight; great fires blazing in every sheltered nook, where the cares of household were carried on in common, for the fishermen who frequented the place lived like one large family. They came from the same village in the neighbourhood, and, from time out of mind, had resorted to this bay as to a spot especially and distinctively their own. They had so identified themselves with the place, that they were only known as Port-na-Whapple men; a vigorous, stalwart, sturdy race of fellows were they, too, that none molested or interfered with willingly.

About forty years before the time we now speak of, a new proprietor had succeeded to the vast estate, which had once belonged to the Mark-Kers, and he quickly discovered that the most valuable part of his inheritance consisted in the fishing royalties of the coast. To assert a right to what nobody ever believed was the actual property of any one in particular, was not a very easy process. Had the Port-na-Whapple men been told that the air they breathed, or the salt sea they traversed, were heritable, they could as readily have believed it, as that any one should assert his claim to the strip of sandy beach where they and their fathers before them had fished for ages.

Sir Archibald Beresford, however, was not a man to relinquish a claim he had once preferred; he had right and parchment on his side, and he cared very little for prescription, or what he called the prejudices of a barbarous peasantry. He went vigorously to work, served the trespassers with due notice to quit, and proceeded against the delinquents at sessions. For years and years the conflict lasted, with various and changeful successes. Now, the landlord would seem triumphant, he had gained his decree, taken out his execution against the nets, the boats, and the tackle, but when the hour of enforcing the law arrived, his bailiffs had been beaten ignominiously from the field, and the fishermen left in full possession of the territory. Driven to desperation by the stubborn resistance, Sir Archy determined on a bolder stand. He erected a cottage on the beach, and established himself there with a strong garrison of retainers well armed, and prepared to defend their rights. Port-na-Whapple was at length won, and although some bloody affrays did occasionally occur between the rival parties, the fishermen were compelled to abandon the station and seek a livelihood elsewhere.

With a confidence inspired by some years of security, Sir

Archy diminished his garrison, till at length it was his habit to come down to the bay accompanied by only a single servant. The old feud appeared to have died out; not indeed that the landlord met those signs of respect from his tenantry which imply good understanding between them; no welcome met him when he came, no regrets followed him when he departed, and even few of the country people accorded the courtesy of touching their hat as they met him passingly on the road. He was a "hard man," however, and cared little for such slights. At length—it was a season when he had exceeded his usual stay at the coast—there came a period of great distress amongst the fishermen. Day after day the boats went out and returned empty. It was in vain that they passed days and nights at sea, venturing far out upon that wild northern ocean—the most treacherous in existence—in vain they explored the bays, more perilous still than the open sea. Their sole subsistence was derived from the sea, and what was to be done? Gaunt famine was stamped on many a hardy face, and strong men dragged their limbs lazily and languidly, as if in sickness. As Sir Archy had never succeeded in obtaining a tenant for the royalty of Port-na-Whapple, he amused himself gaffing the salmon, which he from time to time sent as presents to his friends; and even now, in this season of dearth, many a well-filled hamper found its way up the steep cliffs to be despatched to some remote corner of the kingdom. It was on one of these days that an enormous fish—far too big for any basket—was carefully encased in a matting, and sent off by the Coleraine coach, labelled, "The largest ever gaffed at Port-na-Whapple." Many an eye, half-glazed with hunger, saw the fish, and gazed on the superscription as it was sent into the village, and looks of ominous meaning were cast over the deep cliffs towards the little cottage below. The morning after this, while Sir Archibald's servant was at the post for his letters, a boat rowed into the little cove, and some men, having thrown out the anchor, waded ashore.

"What brings you here, fellows?" cried Sir Archy, haughtily, as he met them on the beach.

"We are come to gaff a bigger fish than yours o' yesterday," said the foremost, striking him on the forehead with the handle of the gaff; and he passed the spear through his heart while he yet reeled under the blow.

Notwithstanding the most active exertions of the Government of the day and the local magistrature, the authors of the foul deed were never discovered, and although there

could be no doubt they were well known to a large population, none betrayed them. More strange still, from that day and hour not a fish was ever taken at Port-na-Whapple! The property had fallen into Chancery, and the interests of the claimants not being very closely guarded, the fishermen were again at liberty to fish wherever they pleased. The privilege was of no value; the fish had deserted the spot, and even when they swarmed at Carrig-a-rede, and all along the shore, not one ever was taken there! That the place was deemed "uncannie," and that none frequented it, need not cause any wonder, and so the little cottage fell into ruin, the boat-house was undermined by the sea and carried away, and even of the little boat-pier only a few bare piles now remained to mark the place, when at length there arrived, from Dublin, a doctor to take charge of the Ballintray Dispensary, and not being able to find a habitable spot in the village, he was fain to put the old cottage in repair, little influenced by the superstition that attached to the unholy place.

He was an elderly man, whose family consisted of his wife and a single servant, and who, from the day of his first arrival, showed a decided repugnance to forming acquaintance with any, or holding other intercourse with his neighbours than what the cares of his profession required. In person he was tall, and even stately; his features those of a man once handsome, but now disfigured by two red blotches over the eyes, and a tremulousness of the nether lip, indications of long years of dissipation, which his watery eye and shaking hand abundantly confirmed. Either, too, from a consciousness of his infirmity, or a shame not less deeply rooted, he never met the eyes of those he addressed, but turned his gaze either askance or to the ground, giving him then an expression very different from the look he wore when alone and unobserved. At such times the face was handsome but haughty, a character of almost defiant pride in the eye, while the angles of the mouth were slightly drawn down, as one sees in persons of proud temperament. A few words will suffice for so much of his history as the reader need know. Herbert Layton had the proud distinction of being a Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, at the age of twenty-one, and, three years later, won, against many distinguished competitors, the chair of medicine in the university. His whole academic career had been a succession of triumphs, and even able men made this excuse for not obtaining honours, that they were "in Layton's division." His was

one of those rare natures to which acquirements the most diverse and opposite are easy. The most critical knowledge of the classics was combined in him with a high-soaring acquaintance with science, and while he carried away the gold medal for verse composition, the very same week announced him as prizeman for microscopic researches. And while he thus swept the college of honours, he was ever foremost in all athletic games and manly exercises. Indeed, the story goes that the gown in which he won his fellowship had been hastily thrown over the jacket of the cricketer. If the blemish served to afflict those who felt the truest friendship for him, it rather contributed to exaggerate the prestige of his name that he was haughty and even overbearing in manner; not meanly condescending to be vain of his successes and the high eminence he had won—far from it, no man treated such triumphs with such supercilious levity, boldly declaring that they were within the reach of all, and that it was a simple question of application to any—his proud demeanour had its source in a certain sense of self-reliance, and a haughty conviction that the occasion had not come—might never come—to show the world the great "stuff that was in him;" and thus, many a rumour ran, "Layton is sorry for having taken to medicine; it can lead to nothing: at the Bar he must have gained every eminence—entered Parliament—risen, Heaven knows to what, or where. Layton cannot conceal his dissatisfaction with a career of no high rewards." And thus they sought for the explanation of that demeanour which hurt the pride of many and the sympathy of all.

Partly from the aggressive nature of the passion of self-esteem, never satisfied if, with each day, it has not made further inroad, partly, perhaps, from the estrangement of friends, wearied out by endless pretensions, Layton at last lived utterly companionless and alone. His habits of hard work made this the less remarkable; but stories were soon abroad that he had abandoned himself to drink, and that the hours believed to be passed in study were in reality spent in debauch and intoxication. His appearance but unhappily gave some corroboration to the rumour. He had grown careless in his dress, slouching in his walk; his pale, thoughtful face was often flushed with a glow exercise never gives; and his clear bright eye no longer met another's with boldness. He neglected, besides, all his collegiate duties, his pupils rarely could obtain sight of him, his class-room was always deserted, a brief notice "that the Regius Professor was

indisposed, and would not lecture," remaining affixed to the door for the entire session.

While this once great reputation was thus crumbling away, there arose another, and, the time considered, a far more dangerous imputation. It was the terrible period of 1807, and men said that Layton was deep in all the designs of the Emmet party. So completely was the insurrection limited to men of the very humbler walks in life, so destitute was the cause of all support from persons of station or influence, that it is scarcely possible to picture the shock—almost passing belief—of the world when this report began to gain currency and credit. Were the public to-morrow to learn that some great and trusted political leader was found out to be secretly in the pay of France or Russia, it would not excite more incredulous horror than at that day was caused by imputing rebellious projects to Herbert Layton.

The honour of the University was too deeply involved to suffer such a charge to be rashly circulated. The board summoned the Regius Professor to attend before them. He returned his reply to the summons on the back of a letter constituting him a member of the "United Irishmen," the great rebel association of the day. As much out of regard to their own fame, as in pity for a rashness that might have cost him his life, they destroyed the document and deprived him of his fellowship.

From the day that he wandered forth a ruined, houseless, destitute man, little is known of him. At long intervals of time, men would say, "Could that have been poor Herbert, that 'Layton,' taken up by the police for drunkenness, or accused of some petty crime? Was it he who was charged with sending threatening letters to this one, or making insolent demands on that?" Another would say, "I could swear I saw Layton as a witness in one of those pot-house trials where the course of law proceedings is made the matter of vulgar jest." Another met him hawking quack medicines in a remote rural district.

It is not necessary we should follow him through these changes, each lower than the last in degradation. We arrive by a bound at a period when he kept a small apothecary's shop in a little village of North Wales, and where, with seeming reformation of character, he lived discreetly, and devoted himself assiduously to the education of an only son.

By dint of immense effort, and sacrifices the most painful, he succeeded in entering his boy at Cambridge; but in his last year, his means failing, he had obtained a tutorship for

him—no less a charge than that of the young Marquis of Agincourt—an appointment to which his college tutor had recommended him. Almost immediately after this, a vacancy occurring in the little village of Ballintray for a dispensary doctor, Layton applied for the appointment, and obtained it. Few, indeed, of the electors had ever heard of his name, but all were astonished at the ample qualifications tendered by one willing to accept such humble duties. The rector of the parish, Doctor Millar, was, though his junior, perhaps, the only one well conversant with Layton's story, for he had been his contemporary at the University.

On the two or three occasions on which they met, Doctor Millar never evinced by the slightest allusion any knowledge of the other's antecedents. He even, by adroit reference to English life and habits, in contradistinction to Irish, seemed to infer that his experiences were more at home there; and whatever might have been Layton's own secret promptings, there was nothing in the clergyman's manner to provoke the slightest constraint or awkwardness.

The reader is now sufficiently informed to accompany us to the little cottage on the beach of Port-na-Whapple. It is a warm autumnal afternoon, the air calm and still, but the great sea comes heaving in, wave swelling after wave, as though moved by a storm. Strange contrast to that loud thundering ocean the little peaceful cottage, whose blue smoke rises in a thin, straight column into the air. The door is open, and a few ducks, with their young brood, are waddling up and down the blue stone step, as though educating their young in feats of difficulty and daring. On a coarse wooden perch within the hall sits a very old grey parrot, so old that his feathers have assumed, a sort of half-woolly look, and his bleared eyes only open at intervals, as though he had seen quite enough of this world already, and could afford to take it easily. In the attitude of the head, partially thrown forward and slightly on one side, there is a mock air of thought and reflection, marvellously aided by a habit the creature has of muttering to himself such little broken ends of speech as he possesses. Layton had bought him a great many years back, having fancied he could detect a resemblance in him to a once famed vice-provost of Trinity, after whom he called him "Doctor Barret," a name the bird felt proud of, as well he might, and seemed even now, in his half dotage, to warm up on hearing it. Through the open door of a little room adjoining might be seen a very pale, sickly woman, who coughed almost incessantly as she

bent over an embroidery-frame. Though not much more than middle-aged, her hair was perfectly white, and deep discolorations—the track of tears for many a day—marked her worn cheeks.

On the opposite side of the hall, in a small room whose furniture was an humble truckle-bed, and a few shelves with physic-bottles, the doctor was engaged at his toilet, if, by so pretentious a term we may record the few preparations he was making to render his every-day appearance more presentable. As he stood thus in trousers and shirt, his broad chest and powerful neck exposed, he seemed to testify even yet to the athletic vigour of one who was known as the best hurler and racket-player of his day. He had been swimming a long stretch far out to sea, and air and exercise together had effaced many of those signs of dissipation which his face usually wore, while in his voice there was a frank boldness that only came back to him at some rare intervals.

"I can fancy, Grace," cried he, loud enough to be heard across the hall, "that Millar is quite proud of his condescension. The great rector of the parish, man of fortune besides, stooping to invite the dispensary doctor! Twelve hundred per annum associating with eighty! To be sure he says, 'You will only meet two friends and neighbours of mine,' as though to intimate, 'I am doing this on the sly; I don't mean to make you a guest on field-days.'"

She muttered something, speedily interrupted by a cough, and he, not caring to catch her words, went on :—

"It is a politeness that cuts both ways, and makes *me* as uncomfortable as him. This waistcoat has a beggarly account of empty button-holes, and as for my coat, nothing but a dim candle-light would screen its deficiencies. I was a fool to accept!" cried he, impatiently.

"Don't go, Tom! don't go!" screamed the parrot, addressing him by a familiar sobriquet.

"And why not, doctor?" said Layton, laughing at the apropos.

"Don't go! don't go!" repeated the bird.

"Give me your reasons, old boy, and not impossible is it I'll agree with you. What do you say, Grace?" added he, advancing to the door of his room the better to catch her words.

"It is to them the honour is *done*, not to you," said she, faintly, and as though the speech cost her heavily.

"Very hard to persuade the rector of that—very hard to convince the man of silver side-dishes and cut decanters

that he is not the patron of him who dines off delf and drinks out of pewter. Is this cravat too ragged, Grace? I think I'd better wear my black one."

"Yes, the black one," said she, coughing painfully.

"After all, it is no grand occasion—a little party of four."

"What a swell! what a swell!" shrieked the parrot.

"Ain't I? By Jove," laughed Layton, "the doctor is marvellous in his remarks to-day."

"There, I have done my best with such scanty 'properties,'" said he, as he turned away from the glass. "The greatest peril to a shabby man is the self-imposed obligation to show he is better than he looks. It is an almost invariable blunder."

She muttered something inaudibly, and, as usual, he went on with his own thoughts.

"One either assumes a more dictatorial tone, or takes more than his share of the talk, or is more apt to contradict the great man of the company—at least *I* do."

"Don't go, Tom! don't! don't!" called out Doctor Barret.

"Not go?—after all these splendid preparations!" said Layton, with a laugh. "After yourself exclaiming 'What a swell!'"

"It'll never pay—never pay—never pay!" croaked out Poll.

"That I'm sure of, doctor. I never knew one of these politic things that did; but yet we go on through life practising them in the face of all their failure, dancing attendance at levées, loitering in antechambers, all to be remembered by some great man who is just as likely to hate the sight of us. However, this shall be my last transgression."

The faint female voice muttered some indistinct words about what he "owed to himself," and the "rightful station that belonged to him," but he speedily cut the reflection short as he said, "So long as a man is poor as I am, he can only hold his head high by total estrangement from the world. Let him dare to mix with it, and his threadbare coat and patched shoes will soon convince him that they will extend no equality to him who comes among them in such beggarly fashion. With what authority, I ask, can he speak, whose very poverty refutes his sentiments, and the simple question stands forth unanswerable: 'If this man knew so much, why is he as we see him?'"

"This is, then, to say that misfortune is never unmerited. Surely you do not mean that, Herbert?" said she, with an eagerness almost painful.

"It is exactly what I would say—That for all the purposes of worldly judgments upon men, there is no easier rule than to assume that they who fail deserve failure. Richelieu never asked those who sought high command, 'Are you skilful in the field? are you clever in strategy?' but 'Are you lucky?'"

A deep sigh was her only answer.

"I wonder who Millar's fourth man is to be? Colonel Karstairs, I know, is one; a man of importance to *me*, Grace," said he, laughing; "a two-guinea subscriber to the dispensary! How I wish I were in a more fitting spirit of submissiveness to my betters; and, by ill fortune, this is one of my rebellious days!"

"Don't go, Tom! Don't go, I say!" yelled out Poll.

"Prophet of evil, and evil prophet, hold your tongue! I will go," said he, sternly, and as if answering a responsible adviser; and setting his hat on, with a certain air of dogged defiance, he left the house.

His wife arose, and with feeble steps tottered to the door of the cottage to look after him. A few steps brought him to the foot of the cliff, up the steep face of which a zig-zag path led upwards for fully four hundred feet, a narrow track trodden by the bare feet of hardy mountaineers into some semblance of a pathway, but such as few denizens of towns would willingly have taken. Layton, however, stepped along like one whose foot was not new to the heather; nay, the very nature of the ascent, the bracing air of the sea, and something in the peril itself of the way, seemed to revive in the man his ancient vigour; and few, seeing him from the beach below, as he boldly breasted the steep bluff, or sprang lightly over some fissured chasm, would have deemed him one long since past the prime of life—one, who had spent more than youth, and its ambitions, in excess.

At first, the spirit to press onward appeared to possess him entirely, but ere he reached the half ascent he turned to look down on the yellow strip of strand, and the little cottage, up to whose very door-sill now the foam seemed curling. Never before had its isolation seemed so complete. Not a sail was to be seen seaward, not even a gull broke the stillness with his cry; a low, mournful plash, with now and then a rumbling half thunder, as the sea resounded within some rocky cavern, were the only sounds, and Layton sat down on a mossy ledge, to drink in the solitude in all its fulness. Amidst thoughts of mingled pain and pleasure, memories of long-past struggles, college triumphs and college friendships, came dreary recol-

lections of dark reverses, when the world seemed to fall back from him, and leave him to isolation. Few had ever started with more ambitious yearnings—few with more personal assurances of success. Whatever he tried he was sure to be told, "*There* lies your road, Layton; *that* is the path will lead you to high rewards." He had, besides—strange inexplicable gift—that prestige of superiority about him that made men cede the place to him, as if by prescription. "And what had come of it all?—what had come of it all?" he cried out aloud, suddenly awaking out of the past to face the present. "Why have I failed?" asked he wildly of himself. "Is it that others have passed me in the race? Have my successes been discovered to have been gained by trick or fraud? Have my acquirements been pronounced mere pretensions? These, surely, cannot be alleged of one whose fame can be attested by almost every scientific and literary journal of the empire. No, no! the explanation is easier—the poet was wrong—Fortune *is* a Deity, and some men are born to be unlucky."

With a sudden start he arose, and rallied from these musings. He quickly bethought himself of his engagement, and continued his way upward. When he reached the table-land at top it wanted but a few minutes of five o'clock, and five was the hour for which he was invited, and there was yet two miles to walk to the Rectory. Any one who has lived for a considerable space estranged from society and its requirements, will own to the sense of slavery impressed by a return to the habits of the world. He will feel that every ordinance is a tyranny, and the necessity of being dressed for this, or punctual for that, a downright bondage.

Thus chafing and irritable, Layton walked along. Never was man less disposed to accept hospitality as a polite attention, and more than once did he halt, irresolute whether he should not retrace his steps towards home. "No man," thought he, "could get off more cheaply. They would ascribe it all to my ignorance. What should a poor devil with eighty pounds a year know of politeness? and when I had said, *I* had forgotten the invitation, they would forget *me!*"

Thus self-accusing and self-disparaging, he reached the little avenue gate, which by a trim gravel walk led up to the parsonage. The neat lodge, with its rustic porch, all overgrown with a rich japonica—the well-kept road, along whose sides two little paved channels conducted the water—the flower plats at intervals in the smooth emerald turf, were all

assurances of care and propriety; and as Layton marked them, he muttered, "This is one of the lucky ones."

As Layton moved on with laggard step, he halted frequently to mark some new device or other of ornamental gardening. Now it was a tasteful group of rock-work, over which gracefully creepers hung in festoons; now it was a little knot of flowering shrubs, so artfully intermingled as to seem as though growing from a single stem; now a tiny fish-pond could be descried through the foliage; even the rustic seats, placed at points of commanding view, seemed to say how much the whole scene had been planned for enjoyment, and that every tint of foliage, every undulation of the sward, every distant glimpse caught through a narrow vista, had all been artfully contrived to yield its share of pleasure.

"I wonder," muttered he, bitterly, to himself—"I wonder when this man preaches on a Sunday against wealth and its temptations, reminding others that out of this world men take nothing, but go out upon their new pilgrimage naked and poor, does he ever turn a thought to all these things, so beautiful now, and with that vitality that will make them beautiful years and years after he himself has become dust? I have little doubt," added he, hurriedly, "that he says all this, and believes it too. Here am I, after just as many determinations to eat no man's salt, nor sit down to any board better than my own—here I am to-day creeping like a poor parasite to a great man's table—ay, he is a great man to *me!*

"How strange is the casuistry, too, with which humble people like myself persuade themselves that they go into the world against their will; that they do so purely from motives of policy, forgetting all the while how ignoble is the motive they lay claim to.

"The old Roman moralist told us that poverty had no heavier infliction in its train than that it made men ridiculous, but I tell him he is wrong. It makes men untrue to themselves, false to their own hearts, enemies to their own convictions, doing twenty things every day of their lives that they affect to deem prudent, and know to be contemptible. I wish my worthy host had left me unnoticed!"

He was at last at the door, and rang the bell with the impatient boldness of one chafing and angry with himself. There was a short delay, for the servants were all engaged in the dining-room, and Layton rang again.

"Doctor Millar at home?" asked he, sternly, of the well-powdered footman who stood before him.

"Yes, sir; he's at dinner."

"At dinner! I was invited to dinner!"

"I know, sir; and the doctor waited for half an hour beyond the time; but he has only gone in this moment."

It is just possible, in Layton's then frame of mind, that he had turned away and left the house, never to re-enter it, when a slight circumstance determined him to the opposite. This was the footman's respectful manner as he took the hat from his hand, and threw wide the door for him to pass onward. Ay, it is ever so! Things too trivial and insignificant for notice in this life are every hour influencing our actions and swaying our motives. Men have stormed a breach for a smile, and gone out in black despair with life just for a cold word or a cold look. So much more quickly does the heart influence than the head, even with the very cleverest amongst us.

As Layton entered the dining-room, his host rose to receive him, and, with a polished courtesy, apologized for having gone to table before his arrival. "I gave you half an hour, doctor, and I would have given you longer, but that I am aware a physician is not always master of his time. Colonel Karstairs you are acquainted with. Let me present you to Mr. Ogden. Doctor Layton, Mr. Ogden."

There is no manner that so impresses the world with the idea of self-sufficiency and pretension as that of the bashful man contending against his own diffidence; and this same timidity, that one would imagine so easily rubbed off by contact with the world, actually increases with age, and, however glossed over by an assumed ease and a seeming indifference, lives to torment its possessor to his last day. Of this Layton was an unhappy victim, and while imbued with a consummate self-esteem, he had a painful consciousness of the criticism that his manner and breeding might call forth. The result of this conflict was to render him stern, defiant, and even overbearing—traits which imparted their character even to his features in first intercourse with strangers.

"I don't know how Halford managed it," said Mr. Ogden, as he reseated himself at table, "but I've heard him say that his professional engagements never lost him a dinner."

Simple as were these words, they contained a rebuke, and the air of the man that uttered them did not diminish their significance.

Mr. Ogden was a thin, pale, pock-marked man, with an upstanding head of grey hair, a very high and retreating forehead, and a long upper lip—one of those men in whom the face, disproportionately large for the head, always gives the impression of a self-sufficient nature. He had a harsh,

sharp voice, with an articulation of a most painful accuracy, even his commonplaces being enunciated with a sort of distinct impressiveness, as though to imply that his copper was of more value than another man's gold. Nor was this altogether a delusion; he had had a considerable experience of mankind and the world, and had contrived to pass his bad money on them as excellent coin of the realm. He was—and it is very distinctive in its mark—one of those men who always live in a class above their own, and, whatever be the recognition and the acceptance they have there, are ever regarded by their rightful equals as something peculiarly privileged and superior.

"My lord" would have called him a useful man; his friends all described him as "influential." But he was something greater than either—he was a successful man. We are constantly told that the efficiency of our army is mainly owing to the admirable skill and ability of its petty officers. That to their unobtrusive diligence, care, and intelligence, we are indebted for all those qualities by which a force is rendered manageable, and victories are won. Do we not see something very similar in our Bureaucracy? Is not our Government itself almost entirely in the hands of "petty officers"? The great minister who rises in his place in Parliament, the exponent of some grand policy, the author of some extensive measure, is, after all, little more than the mouthpiece of some "Mr. Ogden" in Downing Street; some not very brilliant or very statesmanlike personage, but a man of business habits, every-day intelligence, and long official traditions—one of those three or four men in all England who can say to a minister, "It can't be done," and yet give no reason why.

The men of this Ogden stamp are, in reality, great influences in a country like ours, where frequent changes of government require that the conditions of office should be transmitted through something higher and more responsible than mere clerks. They are the stokers who keep the fires alight and the steam up till a new captain comes aboard, and, though neither commanders nor pilots, they *do* manage to influence the course of the ship, by the mere fact that they can diminish the force of her speed or increase its power without any one being very well aware of how or wherefore.

Such men as these are great people in that dingy old house, whose frail props without are more than emblems of what goes on within. Of their very offices men speak as of the Holy of Holies; places where none enter fearlessly save secretaries of state, and at whose door inferior mortals wipe

their feet with heart-sinking fear and lowness of spirit, rehearsing not unfrequently the abject words of submissiveness with which they are to approach such greatness.

It is curious, therefore, to see one of these men in private life. One wishes to know how M. Houdin will look without his conjuring rod, or what Coriolanus will do in plain clothes; for, after all, he must come into the world unattended with his belongings, and can no more carry Downing Street about with him than could Albert Smith carry "China" to a dinner-party.

And now the soup has been brought back, and the fish, somewhat cold and mangled, to be sure, has been served to Doctor Layton; the servant has helped him to an admirable glass of sherry, and the dinner proceeds pleasantly enough—not, however, without its casualties. But of these the next chapter will tell us.

CHAPTER IX.

A DINNER AT THE RECTORY.

THERE are men who have specialities for giving admirable "little dinners," and little dinners are unquestionably the *ne plus ultra* of social enjoyment. To accomplish these there are far more requirements necessary than the world usually wots of. They are not the triumphs of great houses, with regiments of yellow plush and gold candelabra; they affect no vast dining-rooms, nor a private band. They are, on the contrary, the prerogatives of moderate incomes, middle-aged or elderly hosts, usually bachelors, with small houses, furnished in the perfection of comfort, without any display, but where everything, from the careful disposal of a fire-screen to the noiseless gait of the footman, shows you that a certain supervision and discipline prevail, even though you never hear an order and rarely see a servant.

Where these people get their cooks, I never could make out! It is easy enough to understand that fish and soup, your sirloin and your woodcock, could be well and carefully dressed, but who devised that exquisite little entrée? what

genius presided over that dish of maccaroni, that omelette, or that soufflé? Whence, besides, came the infinite taste of the whole meal, with its few dishes, served in an order of artistic elegance? And that butler, too; how quiet, how observant, how noiseless his ministration! how steady his decanter hand! Where did they find *him?* And that pale sherry, and that Chablis, and that exquisite cup of Mocha? Don't tell me that you or I can have them all as good, that you know his wine-merchant, and have the receipt for his coffee. You might as well tell me you could sing like Mario because you employ his hairdresser. No, no; they who accomplish these things are peculiar organizations. They have great gifts of order and system, the nicest perceptions of taste, considerable refinement, and no small share of sensuality. They possess a number of high qualities in miniature, and are, so to say, "great men seen through the wrong end of a telescope."

Of this the Reverend Doctor Millar was a pleasing specimen. With that consciousness of having done everything possible for your comfort which makes a good host, he had a racy gratification in quietly watching your enjoyment. Easily and unobtrusively marking your taste for this or preference for that, he would contrive that your liking should be gratified, as though by mere accident, and never let you know yourself a debtor for the attentions bestowed upon you. It was his pride to have a perfect establishment: would that all vanity were as harmless and as pleasurable to others! And now to the dinner, which, in our digression, we are forgetting.

"Try these cutlets, doctor," interposed the host. "It is a receipt I brought back with me from Provence; I think you'll find them good."

"An over-rich, greasy sort of cuisine is the Provençale," remarked Ogden.

"And yet almost every good cook of France comes from that country," said Layton.

Ogden raised his large double eye-glass to look at the man who thus dared to "cap" a remark of his.

"I wish we could get out of the bastard French cookery all the clubs give us now-a-days," said the colonel. "You neither see a good English joint, nor a well-dressed entrée."

"An emblem of the alliance," said Layton, "where each nation spoils something of its own in the effort to be more palatable to its neighbour."

"Apparently, then, sir, the great statesmen who that pro-

moted this policy are not fortunate enough to enjoy your sanction?" said Ogden, with an insolent air.

"My sanction is scarcely the word for it. They have not certainly my approval."

"I hope you like French wines though, doctor," said the host, eager to draw the conversation into some easier channel. "Taste that Sauterne."

"It only wants age to be perfect," said the doctor, sipping. "All these French white wines require more time than the red."

Ogden again looked through his glass at the dispensary doctor who thus dared to give judgment on a question of such connoisseurship; and then, with the air of one not easily imposed on, said,—

"You have travelled much abroad, perhaps?"

Layton bowed a silent assent.

"I think I saw a German diploma amongst the papers you forwarded to our committee?" said Karstairs.

"Yes, I am a doctor of medicine of Göttingen."

"A university, I verily believe, only known to Englishmen through Canning's doggerel," said Ogden.

"I trust not, sir. I hope that Blumenbach's name alone would rescue it from such oblivion."

"I like the Germans, I confess," broke in the colonel. "I served with Arentschild's Hanoverians, and never knew better or pleasanter fellows."

"Oh, I by no means undervalue Germans!" said Ogden. "I think we, at this very moment, owe to them no small gratitude for suggesting to us the inestimable practice of examination for all public employment."

"In my mind, the greatest humbug of an age of humbug!" said Layton, fiercely.

"Nay, doctor, you will, I'm certain, recall your words when I tell you that my friend here, Mr. Ogden, is one of the most distinguished promoters of that system."

"The gentleman would confer a far deeper obligation upon me by sustaining than by withdrawing his thesis," said Ogden, with a sarcastic smile.

"To undertake the task of sustaining the cause of ignorance against knowledge," said Layton, quietly, "would be an ungrateful one always. In the present case, too, it would be like pitting myself against that gentleman opposite. I decline such an office."

"So, then, you confess that such would be your cause, sir?" said Ogden, triumphantly.

"No, sir; but it would partake so much the appearance of such a struggle, that I cannot accept it. What I called a humbug was the attempt to test men's fitness for the public service by an examination, at which the most incapable might distinguish himself, and the ablest not pass. The system of examination begot the system of 'grinding'—a vulgar term for a more vulgar practice, and a system the most fatal to all liberal education, limiting study to a question-and-answer formula, and making acquirements only desirable when within the rubric of a Government commission. Very different would have been the result if the diploma of certain recognized educational establishments had been required as qualification to serve the State; if the law ran, 'You shall be a graduate of this university, or that college, or possess the licentiate degree of that school.'"

"Your observations seem, then, rather directed against certain commissioners than the system they practise?" said Ogden, sarcastically.

"Scarcely, sir. My experience is very limited. I never met but one of them!"

The colonel laughed heartily at this speech—he couldn't help it; and even the host, mortified as he was, gave a half-smile. As for Ogden, his pale face grew a shade sicklier, and his green eyes more fishy.

"To question the Post-office clerk or the landing waiter," continued Layton, with fresh warmth—for when excited he could rarely control himself—"to test some poor aspirant for eighty pounds per annum in his knowledge of mathematics or his skill in physical geography, while you make governors that cannot speak correctly, and vice-governors whose despatches are the scorn of Downing Street; to proclaim that you want your tide-waiter to be a moral philosopher, but that the highest offices in the State may be held by any political partisan active enough, troublesome enough, and noisy enough to make himself worth purchase; you demand logarithms and special geometry from a clerk in the Customs, while you make a millowner a cabinet minister on the simple showing of his persevering: and your commissioners, too—'Quis custodiet, ipsos custodes!'"

"You probably, however, submitted to be examined, once on a time, for your medical degree?" asked Ogden.

"Yes, sir; and that ordeal once passed, I had ample leisure to unlearn the mass of useless rubbish required of me, and to address myself to the real cares of my profession. But do you suppose that if it were demanded of me to subject myself

to another examination to hold the humble post I now fill, that I should have accepted it?"

"I really cannot answer that question," said Ogden, superciliously.

"Then I will, sir. I would not have done so. Eighty pounds a year is a very attractive bribe, but it may require too costly a sacrifice to win it."

"The neighbourhood is a very poor one," struck in Millar, "and, indeed, if it had not been for the strenuous exertions of my friend Colonel Karstairs here, we should never have raised the forty pounds which gives us the claim for as much more in the presentments."

"And yet you got two hundred and thirty for a regatta in June last!" said Layton, with a quiet smile.

"The way of the world, doctor; the way of the world! Men are never stingy in what regards their own amusements!"

"That is the port, doctor, the other is Lafitte," said the rector, as he saw Layton hesitate about a choice.

And now the talk took a capricious turn, as it will do occasionally in those companies where people are old-fashioned enough to "sit" after dinner, and let the decanter circulate. Even here, however, conversation could not run smoothly. Ogden launched into the manufacture of wines, the chemistry of adulterations, and the grape disease, on every one of which Layton found something to correct him—some slip or error to set right—an annoyance all the more poignant, that Karstairs seemed to enjoy it heartily. From fabricated wines to poisons the transition was easy, and they began to talk of certain curious trials wherein the medical testimony formed the turning-point of conviction. Here, again, Layton was his superior in information, and made the superiority felt. Of what the most subtle tests consisted, and wherein their fallacy lay, he was thoroughly master, while his retentive memory supplied a vast variety of curious and interesting illustration.

Has our reader ever "assisted" at a scene where the great talker of a company has unexpectedly found himself confronted by some unknown, undistinguished competitor, who, with the pertinacity of an actual persecution, will follow him through all the devious windings of an evening's conversation, ever present to correct, contradict, amend, or refute? In vain the hunted martyr seeks out some new line of country, or starts new game; his tormentor is ever close behind him. Ogden wandered from law to literature. He

tried art, scientific discovery, religious controversy, agriculture, foreign travel, the drama, and field sports; and Layton followed him through all—always able to take up the theme and carry it beyond where the other had halted. If Millar underwent all the tortures of an unhappy host at this, Karstairs was in ecstasy. He had been spending a week at the Rectory in Ogden's company, and it seemed a sort of just retribution now that this dictatorial personage should have met his persecutor. Layton, always drinking deeply as the wine came to him, and excited by a sort of conflict, which, for years back, he had never known, grew more and more daring in his contradictions, less deferential, and less fearful of offending. Whatever little reserve he had felt at first, oozed away as the evening advanced. The law of physics is the rule of morals, and as the swing of the pendulum is greater in proportion to the retraction, so the bashful man, once emancipated from his reserve, becomes the most daringly aggressive to mortals. Not content with refuting, he now ridiculed; his vein of banter was his richest, and he indulged it in all the easy freedom of one who defied reprisals. Millar tried once or twice to interpose, and was at last fain to suggest that, as the decanters came round untouched, they should adjourn to coffee.

Ogden rose abruptly at the intimation, and, muttering something inaudible, led the way into the drawing-room.

"You have been too hard upon him, doctor," whispered Karstairs, as he walked along at Layton's side. "You should be more careful; he is a man of note on the other side of the channel; he was a Treasury Lord for some six months once; and is always in office somewhere. I see you are rather sorry for this yourself."

"Sorry! I'm sorry to leave that glorious Madeira, which I know I shall never taste again," said Layton, sternly.

"Are you a smoker, Doctor Layton?" said the host. "If so, don't forget this house gives all a bachelor's privileges. Try these cheroots."

"Liberty Hall!" chimed in the colonel, with a vacant laugh.

"Not a bad name for your dining-room, Millar," said Ogden, bitterly.

A slight shrug was the parson's answer.

"Is this man a frequent guest here?" he asked again, in a low whisper.

"It is his first time. I need scarcely say, it shall be his last," replied Millar, as cautiously.

"I felt for you, Millar. I felt what pain he must have been giving you, though, for myself, I pledge you my word it was most amusing; his violence, his presumption, the dictatorial tone in which he affirmed his opinions, were high comedy. I was half sorry when you proposed coffee."

Under pretence of admiring some curiously carved chessmen, Karstairs had withdrawn the doctor into a small room adjoining; but, in reality, his object was the friendly one of suggesting greater caution and more reserve on his part.

"I don't say," whispered he—"I don't say that you weren't right, and he wrong, in everything. I know nothing about false quantities in Latin, or German metaphysics, or early Christian art. You may be an authority in all of them. All I say is, *he* is a great Government official, and *you* are a village doctor."

"That was exactly why I couldn't let slip the opportunity," broke in Layton. "Let me tell you an incident I once witnessed in my old days of coach travelling. I was going up from Liverpool to London in the 'Umpire,' that wonderful fast coach that astonished the world by making the journey in thirty-six hours. I sat behind the coachman, and was struck by the appearance of the man on the box-seat, who, though it was the depth of winter, and the day one of cutting sleet and cold wind, wore no upper coat, or any protection against the weather. He was, as you may imagine, speedily wet through, and presented in his dripping and soaked habiliments as sorry a spectacle as need be. In fact, if any man's external could proclaim want and privation, his did. The signs of poverty, however, could not screen him from the application of 'Won't you remember the coachman, sir?' He, with no small difficulty—for he was nearly benumbed with cold—extricated a sixpence from his pocket and tendered it. The burly driver flung it contemptuously back to him with insult, and sneeringly asked him how he could dare to seat himself on the box when he was travelling like a pauper? The traveller never answered a word; a slight flush once, indeed, showed how the insult stung him, but he never uttered a syllable.

"'If I had you down here for five minutes, I'd teach you as how you'd set yourself on the box-seat again!' cried coachee, whose passion seemed only aggravated by the other's submission. Scarcely were the words spoken, when the dripping traveller began to descend from the coach. He was soon on the ground, and almost as he touched it the

coachman rushed upon him. It was a hand-to-hand conflict, which, however, could not have lasted four minutes. The stranger not only 'stopped' every blow of the other, but followed each 'stop' by a well-sent-in one of his own, dealt with a force that, judging from his size, seemed miraculous. With closed eyes, a smashed jaw, and a disabled wrist, the coachman was carried away; while the other, as he drank off a glass of cold water, simply said, 'If that man wishes to know where to find me again, tell him to ask for Tom Spring, Crane Alley, Borough Road!'"

Karstairs followed the anecdote with interest, but somehow—for he was not a very brilliant man, though "an excellent officer"—missed the application. "Capital—excellent—by Jove!" cried he. "I'd have given a crown to have seen it."

Layton turned away in half ill-humour.

"And so it was Tom Spring himself?" said the colonel. "Who'd have guessed it?"

Layton made no reply, but began to set the chessmen upon the board at random.

"Is this another amongst your manifold accomplishments, sir?" asked Ogden, as he came up to the table.

"I play most games," said Layton, carelessly; "but it's only at billiards that I pretend to any skill."

"I'm a very unworthy antagonist," said Ogden; "but perhaps you will condescend to a game with me—at chess, I mean?"

"With pleasure," said Layton, setting the pieces at once. He won the first move, and just as he was about to begin he stopped, and said, "I wish I knew your strength."

"The players give me a knight, and generally beat me," said Ogden.

"Oh! I understand. Will you allow me to fetch a cheroot? I move king's knight's pawn one square." He arose as he spoke, and walked into the adjoining room.

Ogden moved his queen's pawn.

Layton, from the adjoining room, asked the move, and then said, "King's bishop to knight's first square;" meanwhile continuing to search for a cigar to his liking.

"Do you purpose to continue the game without seeing the board?" asked Ogden, as he bit his lip with impatience.

"Not if you prefer otherwise," said Layton, who now came back to his place, with his cigar fully lighted.

"You see what an inexorable enemy I have, Millar," said

Ogden, with an affected laugh; "he will not be satisfied unless my defeat be ignominious."

"Is it so certain to be a defeat, George?" said the rector. "Chess was always your great game. I remember how the Windsor Club entertained you on the occasion of your victory over that Swiss player, Eshwald."

"And so you have beaten Eshwald," broke in Layton, hastily. "We must give no quarter here." And with this he threw away his cigar, and bent down over the board.

"We shall only disturb them, Karstairs; come along into the drawing-room, and let us talk parish business," said the rector. "Our little dinner has scarcely gone off so well as I had expected," said Millar, when they were alone. "I meant to do our doctor a service, by asking him to meet Ogden, who has patronage and influence in every quarter; but I suspect that this evening will be remembered grievously against him."

"I confess I was highly amused at it all, and not sorry to see your friend Ogden so sorely baited. You know well what a life he has led us here for the last week."

"A hard hitter sometimes, to be sure," said the rector, smiling; "but a well-meaning man, and always ready for a kind action. I wish Layton had used more moderation—more deference towards him."

"Your Madeira did it all, Millar. Why did you give the fellow such insinuating tipple as that old '31 wine?"

"I can't say that I was not forewarned," continued Millar. "I was told, on his coming down to our neighbourhood, to be careful of him. It was even intimated to me that his ungovernable and overbearing temper had wrecked his whole fortune in life; for of course one can easily see such a man ought not to be sentenced to the charge of a village dispensary."

"No matter how clever you are, there must be discipline; that's what I've always told the youngsters in my regiment."

The rector sighed; it was one of those hopeless little sighs a man involuntarily heaves when he finds that his companion in a *tête-à-tête* is always "half an hour behind the coach."

"I intended, besides," resumed Millar, "that Ogden should have recommended to the Government the establishment of a small hospital down here; an additional fifty or sixty pounds a year would have been a great help to Layton."

"And of course he'll do it, when you ask him," said the hearty colonel. "Now that he has seen the man, and had

the measure of his capacity, he'll be all the readier to serve him."

"The cleverest of all my school and college companions sacrificed his whole career in life by shooting the pheasant a great minister had just 'marked.' He was about to be invited to spend a week at Drayton; but the invitation never came."

"I protest, Millar, I don't understand that sort of thing."

"Have you never felt, when walking very fast, and eagerly intent upon some object, that if an urchin crossed your path, or came rudely against you, it was hard to resist the temptation of giving him a box on the ear? I don't mean to say that the cases are parallel, but great people do somehow acquire a habit of thinking that the road ought always to be cleared for *them*, and they will not endure whatever interferes with their wishes."

"But don't you think if you gave Layton a hint——"

"Isn't that like it? Hear that——"

A loud burst of laughter from the adjoining room cut short the colloquy, and Layton's voice was heard in a tone of triumph, saying, "I saw your plan—I even let you follow it up to the last, for I knew you were checkmated."

"I'm off my play—I have not touched a chessman these three years," said Ogden, pettishly.

"Nor I for three times three years; nor was it ever my favourite game."

"I'm coming to crave a cup of tea from you, Millar," said Ogden, entering the drawing-room, flushed in the cheek, and with a flurried manner.

"Who won the game?" asked the colonel, eagerly.

"Doctor Layton was the conqueror; but I don't regard myself as an ignoble foe, notwithstanding," said Ogden, with a sort of look of appeal towards the doctor.

"I'll give you a bishop and play you for——" He stopped in some confusion, and then, with an effort at a laugh, added, "I was going to say fifty pounds, quite forgetting that it was possible you might beat me."

"And yet, sir, I have the presumption to think that there are things which I could do fully as well as Doctor Layton."

Layton turned hastily round from the table, where, having half filled a large glass with brandy, he was about to fill up with soda-water; he set down the unopened soda-water bottle, and drinking off the raw spirit at a draught, said,—

"What are they? let's hear them, for I take the challenge; these gentlemen be my witnesses that I accepted the gage before I knew your weapon." Here he replenished his glass,

and this time still higher than before, and drank it off. "You have, doubtless, your speciality, your pet subject, art or science, what is it? Or have you more than one? You're not like the fellow that Scott tells us could only talk of tanned leather—eh, Millar, you remember that anecdote?"

The rector started with that sort of spasm that unobtrusive men feel when first accosted familiarly by those almost strangers to them.

"Better brandy than this I never tasted," said Layton, now filling out a bumper, while his hand shook so much that he spilled the liquor over the table; "and, as Tom Warrendar used to say, as he who gives you unpleasant advice is bound in honour to lend you money, so he who gives you light claret, if he be a man of honour, will console you with old brandy afterwards; and you are a man of honour, Millar, and a man of conscience, and so is our colonel here—albeit nothing remarkable in other respects; and as for that public servant, as he likes to call himself—the public servant, if I must be candid—the public servant is neither more nor less than——" Here he stretched out his arm to its full length, to give by the gesture greater emphasis to what he was about to utter, and then staring half wildly, half insolently around him, he sank down heavily into a deep arm-chair, and as his arms dropped listlessly beside him, fell back insensible.

"I will say that I never felt deeper obligation to a brandy-bottle; it is the first enjoyable moment of the whole evening," said Ogden, as he sat down to the tea-table.

In somewhat less than half an hour afterwards, Layton awoke with a sort of start, and looked wildly and confusedly around him. What, or how much he remembered of the events of the evening, is not possible to say, as, with a sudden spring to his feet, he took his hat, and with a short "good night," left the house, and hurried down the avenue.

CHAPTER X.

THE LABORATORY.

THERE was a small closet-like room in Layton's cottage which he had fitted up, as well as his very narrow means permitted, as a laboratory. Everything in it was, of course, of the very humblest kind, soda-water flasks were fashioned into retorts, and even blacking-jars held strange chemical mixtures. Here, however, he spent most of his time in the search of some ingredient by which he hoped to arrest the progress of all spasmodic disease. An accidental benefit he had himself derived from a certain salt of ammonia had suggested the inquiry, and for years back this had constituted the main object of all his thoughts. Determined, if his discovery were to prove a success, it should burst upon the world in all its completeness, he had never revealed to any one but his son the object of his studies. Alfred, indeed, was made participator of his hopes and ambitions; he had seen all the steps of the inquiry, and understood thoroughly the train of reasoning on which the theory was based. The young man's patience in investigation, and his powers of calculation, were of immense value to his father, and Layton deeply regretted the absence of the one sole assistant he could or would confide in. A certain impatience, partly constitutional, partly from habits of intemperance, had indisposed the old man to those laborious calculations by which chemical discovery is so frequently accompanied, and these he threw upon his son, who never deemed any labour too great, or any investigation too wearisome, if it should save his father some part of his daily fatigue. It was not for months after Alfred's departure that Layton could re-enter his study, and resume his old pursuits. The want of the companionship that cheered him, and the able help that seconded all his efforts, had so damped his ardour, that he had, if not abandoned his pursuit, at least deferred its prosecution indefinitely. At last, however, by a vigorous effort, he resumed his old labour, and in the interest of his search he soon regained much of his former ambition for success.

The investigations of chemistry have about them all the fluctuating fortunes of a deep and subtle game. There are the same vacillations of good and bad luck; the same tides of hope and fear; the almost certain prospect of success dashed and darkened by failure; the grief and disappointment of failure dispelled by glimpses of bright hope. So many are the disturbing influences, so subtle the causes which derange experiment, where some infinitesimal excess or deficiency, some minute accession of heat or cold, some chance adulteration in this or that ingredient, can vitiate a whole course of inquiry, requiring the labour of weeks to be all begun again, that the pursuit at length assumes many of the features of a game, and a game only to be won by securing every imaginable condition of success.

Perhaps this very character was what imparted to Layton's mind one of the most stimulating of all interests; at all events, he addressed himself to his task like one who, baffled and repulsed as he might be, would still not acknowledge defeat. As well from the indefatigable ardour he showed, as from the occasional bursts of boastful triumph in anticipation of a great success in store, his poor ailing wife had grown to fancy that his pursuit was something akin to those wonderful researches after the elixir vitæ, or the philosopher's stone. She knew as little of his real object as of the means he employed to attain it, but she could see the feverish eagerness that daily gained on him, mark his long hours of intense thought, his days of labour, his nights of wakefulness, and her fears were that these studies were undermining his strength and breaking up his vigour.

It was, then, with a grateful joy at her heart she saw him invited to the Rectory—admitted once more to the world of his equals, and the notice of society. She had waited hour by hour for his return home, and it was already daybreak ere she heard him enter the cottage, and repair to his own room. Who knows what deep and heartfelt anxieties were hers as she sought her bed at last? what sorrowful forebodings might not have oppressed her? what bitter tears have coursed along her worn cheeks? for his step was short and impatient as he crossed the little hall, and the heavy slam of his door, and the harsh grating of the lock, told that he was ruffled and angry.

The morning wore on heavily—drearily to her, as she watched and waited, and at last she crept noiselessly to the door, and tapped at it gently.

"Who's there? Come in!" cried he, roughly.

"I came only to ask if you would not have your breakfast," said she, timidly. "It is already near eleven o'clock."

"So late, Grace?" said he, with a more kindly accent, as he offered her a seat. "I don't well know how the time slipped over; not that I was engaged in anything that interested me—I do not believe I have done anything whatever—no, nothing," muttered he, vaguely, as his wearied eye ranged over the table.

"You are tired to-day, Herbert, and you need rest," said she, in a soft, gentle tone. "Let this be a holiday."

"Mine are all holidays now," replied he, with an effort at gaiety. Then suddenly, with an altered voice, he added, "I ought never to have gone there last night, Grace. I knew well what would come of it. I have no habits, no temper, no taste, for such associates. What other thoughts could cross me as I sat there, sipping their claret, than of the cold poverty that awaited me at home? what pleasure to me could that short hour of festivity be, when I knew and felt I must come back to this? And then, the misery, the insult of that state of watchfulness, to see that none took liberties with me, on the score of my humble station."

"But surely, Herbert, there is not any one——"

"I don't know that," broke he in. "He who wears finer linen than you is often a terrible tyrant, on no higher or better ground. If any man has been taught that lesson, *I* have! The world has one easy formula for its guidance. If you be poor, you must be either incompetent or improvident, or both; your patched coat and shabby hat are vouchers for one or the other, and sleek success does not trouble itself to ask which."

"The name of Herbert Layton is a sure guarantee against such depreciation," said she, in a voice tremulous with pride and emotion.

"So it might, if it had not earned a little extra notoriety in police courts," said he, with a laugh of intense bitterness.

"Tell me of your dinner last night," said she, eager to withdraw him from the vein she ever dreaded most. "Was your party a pleasant one?"

"Pleasant!—no, the very reverse of pleasant! We had discussion instead of conversation, and in lieu of those slight differences of sentiment which flavour talk, we had stubborn contradictions. All *my* fault, too, Grace. I was in one of *my* unhappy humours, and actually forgot I was a dispensary doctor and in the presence of an ex-Treasury lord, with

great influence and high acquaintances. You can fancy, Grace, how boldly I dissented from all he said."

"But if you were in the right, Herbert——"

"Which is exactly what I was not; at least, I was quite as often in the wrong. My amusement was derived from seeing how powerless he was to expose the fallacies that outraged him. He was stunned by a fire of blank cartridge, and obliged to retreat before it. But now that it's all over, I may find the amusement a costly one. And then, I drank too much wine——" She gave a heavy sigh, and turned away to hide her look. "Yes," resumed he, with a fierce bitterness in his tone, "the momentary flush of self-esteem—Dutch courage, though it be—is a marvellous temptation to a poor, beaten-down, crushed spirit, and wine alone can give it; and so I drank, and drank on."

"But not to excess," said she, in a half-broken whisper.

"At least to unconsciousness. I know nothing of how or when I quitted the Rectory, nor how I came down the cliffs and reached this in safety. The path is dangerous enough at noonday with a steady head and a cautious foot, and yet last night assuredly I could not boast of either."

Another and a deeper sigh escaped her, despite her efforts to stifle it.

"Ay, Grace, the doctor was right when he said to me, 'Don't go there.' How well if I had but taken his advice! I am no longer fit for such associates. They live lives of easy security—they have not the cares and struggles of a daily conflict for existence; we meet, therefore, on unequal grounds. Their sentiments cost them no more care than the French roll upon their breakfast-table. They can afford to be wrong as they can afford debt, but the poor wretch like myself, a bare degree above starvation, has as little credit with fine folk as with the huckster. I ought never to have gone there! Leave me now," added he, half sternly; "let me see if these gases and essences will not make me forget humanity. No, I do not care for breakfast—I cannot eat!"

With the same noiseless step she had entered, she now glided softly from the room, closing the door so gently, that it was only when he looked round that he was aware of being alone. For a moment or two he busied himself with the objects on the table; he arranged phials and retorts, he lighted his stove, he stood fanning the charcoal till the red mass glowed brightly, and then, as though forgetting the pursuit he was engaged in, he sat down upon a chair, and sank into a dreamy reverie.

Another low tap at the door aroused him from his musings, and the low voice he knew so well gently told him it was his morning to attend the dispensary, a distance fully three miles off. More than one complaint had been already made of his irregularity and neglect, and, intending to pay more attention in future, he had charged his wife to keep him mindful of his duties.

"You will scarcely reach Ballintray before one o'clock, Herbert," said she, in her habitually timid tone.

"What if I should not try? What if I throw up the beggarly office at once? What if I burst through this slavery of patrons, and chairmen, and boards? Do you fancy we should starve, Grace?"

"Oh, no, Herbert," cried she, eagerly; "I have no fears for our future."

"Then your courage is greater than mine," said he, bitterly, and with one of the sudden changes of humour which often marked him. "Can't you anticipate how the world would pass sentence on me, the idle debauchee, who would not earn his livelihood, but must needs forfeit his subsistence from sheer indolence?—ay, and the world would be right, too. He who breaks stones upon the high road will not perform his task the better because he can tell the chemical constituent of every fragment beneath his hammer. Men want common work from common workmen, and there are always enough to be found. I'll set out at once."

With this resolve, uttered in a tone she never gainsaid or replied to, he took his hat and left the cottage.

There is no more aggressive spirit than that of the man who, with the full consciousness of great powers, sees himself destined to fill some humble and insignificant station, well knowing the while the inferiority of those who have conquered the high places in life. Of all the disqualifying elements of his own character, his unsteadiness, his want of thrift, perseverance, or conduct, his deficiency in tact or due courtesy, his stubborn indifference to others,—of all these he will take no account as he whispers to his heart, "I passed that fellow at school!—I beat this one at college!—how often have I helped yonder celebrity with this theme!—how many times have I written his exercise for that great dignitary! Oh, what a deep well of bitterness lies in the nature of one so tried and tortured, and how cruel is the war that he at last wages with the world, and, worse again, with his own heart!

Scarcely noticing the salutations of the country people, as they touched their hats to him on the road, or the more

familiar addresses of the better-to-do farmers as they passed, Layton strode onwards to the little village where his dispensary stood.

"Yer unco late, docther, this morning," said one, in that rebukeful tone the northern Irishman never scruples to employ when he thinks he has just cause of complaint.

"It's na the way to heal folk to keep them waitin' twa hours at a closed door," said another.

"I'se warrant he's gleb eneuch to call for his siller when it's due to him," said a third.

"My gran'mither is just gane hame; she would na bide any longer for yer comin'," said a pert-looking girl, with a saucy toss of her head.

"It's na honest to take people's money and gie naething for it," said an old white-haired man on crutches; "and I'll just bring it before the board."

Layton turned an angry look over the crowd, but never uttered a word. Pride alone would have prevented him from answering them, had he not the deeper motive that in his conflict with himself he took little heed of what they said.

"Where's the key, Sandy?" cried he, impatiently, to an old cripple who assisted him in the common work of the dispensary.

The man came close and whispered something secretly in his ear.

"And carried the key away, do you say?" asked Layton, eagerly.

"Just so, sir. There was anither wi' him—a stranger—and he was mair angry than his rev'rance, and said, 'What can ye expec'? Is it like that a man o' his habits could be entrusted with such a charge as this?'"

"And Doctor Millar—what did he reply?"

"Na much; he just shook his head this way, and muttered, 'I hoped for better—I hoped for better!' I dinna think they'd have taken away the key, but that old Jonas Graham kem up at the time, and said, 'It's mair than a month since we seen him'—yourself he meant—'down here, and them as has the strength for it would rather gae all the gait to Coleraine than tak their chance o' him.' For a' that," said Sandy, "I opened the dispensary door, and was sarvin' out salts and the like, when the stranger said, 'Is it to a cretur like that the people are to trust their health? Just turn the key in the door, Millar, and you'll certainly save some one from being poisoned this morning.' And so he did, and here

we are." And poor Sandy turned a rueful look on the surrounders as he finished.

"I can't cure you as kings used to cure the evil, long ago, by royal touch, good people," said Layton, mockingly; "and your guardians, or governors, or whatever they call themselves, have shut me out of my own premises. I am a priest cut off from his temple."

"I'm na come here to ask for charity," said a stout old fellow, who stood alongside of a shaggy mountain pony; "I'm able to pay ye for a' your docther's stuff, and your skill besides."

"Well spoken, and like a man of independence," said Layton. "Let us open the treaty with a gill of brandy, and you shall tell me your case while I am sipping it." And with these words he led the way into a public-house, followed by the farmer, leaving the crowd to disperse when and how they pleased.

Whatever the nature of those ailments now so confidentially imparted, they were long enough in narration not only to require one, or two, or three gills, but a full bottle of strong mountain whisky, of which it is but fair to say the farmer took his share. Layton's powers as a talker were not long in exercise ere they gained their due influence over his companion. Of the very themes the countryman deemed his own, he found the doctor knew far more than himself; while by his knowledge of life and human nature generally, he surprised his listener, who actually could not tear himself away from one so full of anecdote and observation.

Partly warned by the lateness of the hour—for already the market was over and the streets deserted—and partly by the thick utterance of his companion, whose heavy, bloodshot eye and sullen look now evidenced how deeply he had exceeded, the farmer at last arose to go away.

"You're not 'flitting,' as you call it hereabouts," said Layton, half stupidly. "You're not thinking of leaving me alone to my own company, are you?"

"I maun be thinkin' of home; it's more than twalve miles o' a mountain that's afore me. There's na anither but yoursel' had made me forget it a' this while," said the farmer, as he buttoned his coat and prepared for the road. "Just tell me now what's to pay for the bit o' writin' ye gav' me."

"You've had a consultation, my friend—not a visit, but a regular consultation. You've not been treated like the outer populace, and only heard the oracles from afar, but you have

been suffered to sit down beside the augur, to question him, and to drink with him. Pay—nothing to pay! I'll cure your boy, there's my word on't. These cases are specialities with me. Bell used to say, 'Ask Layton to look at that fellow in such a ward; he's the only one of us understands this sort of thing. Layton will tell us all about it.' And I'm Layton! Ay, sir, this poor, shabby, ill-dressed fellow that you see before you is that same Herbert Layton; so much for brains and ability to work a man's way in life! Order another quart of Isla whisky, man—that's my fee; at least it shall be to-day. Tell them to send me pen, ink, and paper, and not disturb me; tell them, besides—no, never mind, *I*'ll tell them that! And now, good day, my honest fellow. *You*'ve been *my* physician to-day, as much as *I* have been *yours*. You have cured a sick heart—cheated it, at least—out of one paroxysm, and so, a good journey, and safe home to you. Send me news of your boy, and good-bye." And his head dropped as he spoke; his arms fell heavily at his sides; and he appeared to have sunk into a profound sleep. The stupor was but brief; the farmer was not well out of the village when Layton, calling for a basin of cold water, plunged his face and part of his head in it, baring his brawny throat, and bathing it with the refreshing liquid. As he was thus employed, he caught sight of his face reflected in a much-cracked mirror over the fireplace, and stood gazing for a few seconds at his blotched and bloated countenance.

"A year or two left still, belike," muttered he. "Past insuring, but still seaworthy, or, at least"—and here his voice assumed an intense mockery in tone—"at least, capable of more shipwreck!" The sight of the writing materials on the table seemed to recall him to something he had half forgotten, and, after a pause of reflection, he arranged the paper before him and sat down to write.

With the case of one to whom composition was familiar, he dashed off a somewhat long letter; but, though he wrote with great rapidity, he recurred from time to time to the whisky-bottle, drinking the strong spirits undiluted, and, to all seeming, unmoved by its potency. "There," cried he, as he finished, "I have scuttled my own ship; let's see what will come of it."

He called for the landlord to give him wax and a seal. Neither were to be had, and he was fain to put up with a wafer. The letter closed and addressed, he set out homewards; scarcely, however, beyond the outskirts of the village, than he turned away from the coast and took the road towards

the Rectory. It was now the early evening, one of those brief seasons when the wind lulls and a sort of brief calm supervenes in the boisterous climate of northern Ireland. Along the narrow lane he trod, tall foxgloves and variegated ferns grew luxuriantly, imparting a half-shade to a scene usually desolate and bare; and Layton lingered along it as though its calm seclusion soothed him. At last he found himself at a low wall, over which a stile led to a little woodland path. It was the Rectory; who could mistake its trim neatness, the order and elegance which pervaded all its arrangements? Taking this path, he walked leisurely onward, till he came to a small flower-garden, into which three windows opened, their sashes reaching to the ground. While yet uncertain whether to advance or retire, he heard Ogden's sharp voice from within the room. His tone was loud, and had the vibration of one speaking in anger. "Even on your own showing, Millar, another reason for getting rid of him. *You* can't be ambitious, I take it, of newspaper notoriety, or a controversy in the public papers. Now Layton is the very man to drag you into such a conflict. Ask for no explanations, inquire for no reasons, but dismiss him by an act of your board. Your colonel there is the chairman; he couldn't refuse what you insist upon, and the thing will be done without your prominence in it."

Millar murmured a reply, but Layton turned away without listening to it, and made for the hall door. "Give this to your master," said he, handing the letter to the servant, and turned away.

The last flickerings of twilight guided him down the steep path of the cliff, and, wearied and tired, he reached home.

"What a wearisome day you must have had, Herbert!" said his wife, as she stooped for the hat and cane he had thrown beside him on sitting down.

"I mustn't complain, Grace," said he, with a sad sort of smile. "It is the last of such fatigues."

"How, or what do you mean?" asked she, eagerly.

"I have given it up. I have resigned my charge of the dispensary. Don't ask any reasons, girl," broke he in, hastily, "for I scarcely know them myself. All I can tell you is, it is done."

"I have no doubt you were right, Herbert," began she. "I feel assured——"

"Do you? Then, by Heaven! you have a greater confidence in me than *I* have in myself. I believe I was more than two parts drunk when I did it, but doubtless the thought

will sober me when I awake to-morrow morning; till when, I do not mean to think of it."

"You have not eaten, I'm sure."

"I cannot eat just yet, Grace; give me a cup of tea, and leave me. I shall be better alone for a while."

CHAPTER XI.

A REMITTANCE.

"A LETTER—a long letter from Alfred," said Layton's wife, as she knocked at his door on the following morning. "It has been lying for four days at the office in Coleraine. Only think, Herbert, and I fretting and fretting over his silence."

"Is he well?" asked he, half gruffly.

"Quite well, and so happy; in the midst of kind friends, and enjoying himself, as he says he thought impossible when absent from his home. Pray read it, Herbert. It will do you infinite good to see how cheerfully he writes."

"No, no; it is enough that I know the boy is well. As to being happy, it is the affair of an hour, or a day, with the luckiest of us."

"There are so many kind messages to you, and so many anxious inquiries about the laboratory. But you must read them. And then there is a bank order he insists upon your having. Poor fellow! the first money he has ever earned——"

"How much is it, Grace?" asked he, eagerly.

"It is for twenty pounds, Herbert," said she, in a faltering accent, which, even weak as it was, vibrated with something like reproach.

"Never could it be more welcome," said he, carelessly. "It was thoughtful, too, of the boy; just as if he had known all that has happened here." And with this he opened the door, taking hurriedly from her hand the letter and the money-order. "No; not this. I do not want his letter," said he, handing it back to her, while he muttered over the lines of the bank cheque. "Why did he not say—or order?" said he, half angrily. "This necessitates my going to Cole-

raine myself to receive it. It seems that I was overrating his thoughtfulness, after all."

"Oh, Herbert!" said she, pressing both her hands over her heart, as though an acute pain shot through it.

"I meant what I have said," said he, roughly; "he might have bethought him what are twelve weary miles of road to one like me, as well as that my clothes are not such as suit appearance in the streets of a town. It was *not* thoughtful of him, Grace."

"The poor dear boy's first few pounds; all that he could call his own——"

"I know that," broke he in, harshly; "and in what other way could they have afforded him a tithe of the pleasure? It was a wise selfishness suggested the act; that is all you can say of it."

"Oh, but let me read you how gracefully and delicately he has done it, Herbert; how mindful he was not to wound one sentiment——"

"'Pay to Herbert Layton, Esquire'"—read he, half aloud, and not heeding her speech. "He ought to have added 'M.D.'; it is as 'the doctor' they should know me down here. Well, it has come right opportunely, at all events. I believe I was the owner of some fifteen shillings in the world."

A deep, tremulous sigh was all her answer.

"Fifteen and ninepence," muttered he, as he counted over the pieces in his hand. "Great must be the self-reliance of the man who, with such a sum for all his worldly wealth, insults his patrons and resigns his office—eh, Grace?"

There was in his tone a blended mockery and seriousness that he often used, and which, by the impossibility of answering, always distressed her greatly.

"It is clear you do not think so," said he, harshly. "It is evident you take the vulgar view of the incident, and condemn the act as one dictated by ill temper and mere resentment. The world is always more merciful than one's own fireside, and the world will justify me."

"When you have satisfied your own conscience, Herbert——"

"I'll take good care to make no such appeal," broke he in. "Besides," added he, with a bitter levity, "men like myself have not one, but fifty consciences. Their after-dinner conscience is not their waking one next morning; their conscience in the turmoil and bustle of life is not their conscience as they lie out there on the white rocks, listening to the lazy

plash of the waves. Not to say that, after forty, every man's conscience grows casuistical—somewhat the worse for wear, like himself."

It was one of Layton's pastimes to sport thus with the feelings of his poor wife, uttering at random sentiments that he well knew must pain her deeply; and there were days when this spirit of annoyance overbore his reason and mastered all his self-control.

"What pleasant little sketches Alfred gives of his travelling acquaintances!" said she, opening the letter, and almost asking to be invited to read it.

"These things have no value from one as untried in life as he is," broke he in, rudely. "One only learns to decipher character by the time the world has become very wearisome. Does he tell you how he likes his task? How does he fancy bear-leading?

"He praises Lord Agincourt very much. He calls him a fine, generous boy, with many most attaching qualities."

"They are nearly all such in that class in very early life, but, as Swift says, the world is full of promising princes and bad kings."

"Lord Agincourt would appear to be very much attached to Alfred."

"So much the worse; such friendships interfere with the work of tuition, and they never endure after it is over. To be sure, now and then a tutor is remembered, and if he has shown himself discreet about his pupil's misdeeds, reserved as to his shortcomings, and only moderately rebukeful as to his faults, such virtue is often rewarded with a bishopric. What have we here, Grace? Is not that a row-boat rounding the point yonder, and heading into the bay?"

So rare an event might well have caused astonishment, for since the place had been deserted by the fishermen the land-locked waters of the little cove had never seen the track of a boat."

"Who can it be?" continued he; "I see a round hat in the stern-sheets. Look, he is pointing where they are to land him, quite close to our door here." Stimulated by an irrepressible curiosity, Herbert arose and walked out, but scarcely had he reached the strand when he was met by Colonel Karstairs.

"I couldn't trust my gouty ankles down that precipice, doctor," cried he out, "and although anything but a good sailor, I came round here by water. What a charming spot you have here, when one does reach it!"

"It is pretty; and it is better—it is solitary," said Layton, coldly; for somehow he could not avoid connecting the colonel with a scene very painful to his memory.

"I don't think I ever saw anything more beautiful," said Karstairs, as he gazed around him. "The wild, fantastic outlines of those rocks, the variegated colours of the heath blossom, the golden strand, and the cottage itself, make up a fairy scene."

"Let me show you the interior, though it dispel the illusion," said Layton, as he moved towards the door.

"I hope my visit is not inconvenient," said Karstairs, as he entered and took a seat; "and I hope, besides, when you hear the object of it, you will, at least, forgive me." He waited for a reply of some sort, but Layton only bowed his head stiffly, and suffered him to continue: "I am a sorry diplomatist, doctor, and have not the vaguest idea of how to approach a point of any difficulty; but what brought me here this morning was simply this: you sent that letter"—here he drew one from his pocket, and handed it to Layton—"to our friend the rector."

"Yes; it is my hand, and I left it myself at the parsonage."

"Well, now, Millar has shown it to no one but myself—indeed, he placed it in my hands after reading it—consequently, its contents are unknown save to our two selves; there can, therefore, be no difficulty in your withdrawing it. You must see that the terms you have employed towards him are not such as—are not civil, I mean; in fact, they are not fair. He is an excellent fellow, and sincerely your friend besides. Now, don't let a bit of temper get the mastery over better feeling, nor do not, out of a momentary pique, throw up your appointment. None of us, now-a-days, can afford to quarrel with his bread-and-butter; and though you are certainly clever enough and skilful enough not to regard such an humble place as this, yet, remember, you had a score of competitors when you looked for it. Not to say that we all only desire to know how to be of service to you, to make your residence amongst us agreeable, and—and all that sort of thing, which you can understand far better than I can say it!" Nor, to do the worthy colonel justice, was this a very difficult matter, seeing that, in his extreme confusion and embarrassment, he stammered and stuttered at every word, while, to increase his difficulty, the manner of Layton was cold and almost stately.

"Am I to suppose, sir," said he, at length, "that you are here on the part of Doctor Millar?"

"No, no; nothing of the kind. Millar knows, of course, the step I have taken; perhaps he concurs in it—indeed, I'm sure he does. He is your sincere well-wisher, doctor—a man who really wants to be your friend."

"Too much honour," said Layton, haughtily. "Not to say how arduous the task of him who would protect a man against himself; and such I opine to be the assumed object here."

"I'm sure, if I had as much as suspected how you would have taken my interference," said the colonel, more hurt by Layton's tone than by his mere words, "I'd have spared myself my mission."

"You had no right to have anticipated it, sir. It was very natural for you to augur favourably of any intervention by a colonel—a C.B., with other glorious distinctions—in regard to a poor dispensary doctor, plodding the world wearily, with a salary less than a butler's. You had only to look down the cliff, and see the humble cottage where he lived, to calculate what amount of resistance could such a man offer to any proposal that promised him bread."

"I must say, I wish you would not mistake me," broke in Karstairs, with warmth.

"I am not stating anything with reference to *you*, sir; only with respect to those judgments the world at large would pronounce upon *me*."

"Am I to conclude, then," said the colonel, rising, and evidently in anger—"am I to conclude, then, that this is your deliberate act—that you wish to abide by this letter—that you see nothing to recall nor retract in its contents?"

Layton bowed an assent.

"This is too bad—too bad," muttered the colonel, as he fumbled for his gloves, and dropped them twice over in his confusion. "I know well enough where the sting lies: you are angry with Ogden—you suspect that he has been meddling. Well, it's no affair of mine; you are the best judge. Not but a little prudence might have shown you that Ogden was a dangerous man to offend—a very dangerous man; but of course you know best. I have only to ask pardon for obtruding my advice unasked, a stupid act always, but I'm right sorry for it."

"I am very grateful for the intention, sir," said Layton, with dignity.

"That's all I can claim," muttered the colonel, whose confusion increased every moment. "It was a fool's errand, and ends as it ought. Good-bye!"

Layton arose, and opened the door with a respectful air.

Karstairs offered his hand, and, as he grasped the other's warmly, said, "I wish you would let me talk this over with your wife, Layton."

The doctor drew haughtily back, and, with a cold stare of astonishment, said, "I have addressed you by your title, sir; *I* have mine. At all events, there is nothing in your station nor in my own to warrant this familiarity."

"You are quite right—perfectly right—and I ask pardon." It was a liberty never to be repeated, and the bronzed weather-beaten face of the old soldier became crimson with shame as he bowed deeply and passed out.

Layton walked punctiliously at his side till he reached the boat, neither uttering a word; and thus they parted. Layton stood for a moment gazing after the boat. Perhaps he thought that Karstairs would turn his head again towards the shore; perhaps—who knows?—he hoped it. At all events, the old colonel never once looked back, and the boat soon rounded the point and was lost to view.

There are men so combative in their natures that their highest enjoyment is derived from conflict with the world—men whose self-esteem is never developed till they see themselves attacking or attacked. Layton was one of this unhappy number, and it was with a sort of bastard heroism that he strolled back to the cottage, proud in the thought of how he stood, alone and friendless, undeterred by the enmity of men of a certain influence and station.

He was soon in his laboratory and at work, the reaction imparting a great impulse to his energy. He set to work with unwonted vigour and determination. Chemical investigation has its good and evil days: its periods when all goes well, experiments succeed, tests answer, and results respond to what was looked for; and others when disturbing causes intervene, gases escape, and retorts smash. This was one of the former; and the subtle essence long sought after by Layton, so eagerly desired, and half despaired of, seemed at last almost within reach. A certain salt, an ingredient very difficult of preparation, was, however, wanting to his further progress, and it was necessary that he should provide himself with it ere he advanced any further. To obtain this without any adulterating admixture, and in all purity, was essential to success, and he determined to set out immediately for Dublin, where he could himself assist in its preparation.

"What good luck it was, Grace," said he, as he entered the room where she sat awaiting dinner for him—"what good

luck that the boy should have sent us this money. I must go up to Dublin to-morrow, and without it I must have given up the journey."

"To Dublin!" said she, in a half-frightened voice, for she dreaded—not without reason—the temptations he would be exposed to when accidentally lifted above his usual poverty.

"Ay, girl; I want a certain 'cyanuret' of which you have never heard, nor can help me to any knowledge of, but which a Dublin chemist that I know of will assist me to procure; and with this salt I purpose to make myself a name and reputation that even Mr. Ogden will not dare to dispute. I shall, I hope, have discovered what will render disease painless, and deprive operation of all its old terrors. If my calculations be just, a new era will dawn upon medical science, and the physician come to the sick man as a true comforter. My discovery, too, is no empyric accident for which I can give no reason, nor assign no cause, but the result of patient investigation, based upon true knowledge. My appeal will be to the men of science, not to popular judgments. I ask no favour—I seek no patronage. Herbert Layton would be little likely to find either; but we shall see if the name will not soar above both favour and patronage, and rank with the great discoverers, or, better again, with the great benefactors of mankind."

Vainglorious and presumptuous as this speech was—uttered, too, in a tone boastful as the words themselves—it was the mood which Layton's wife loved to see him indulge. If for nothing else than it was the reverse of the sardonic and bitter raillery he often practised—a spirit of scoff in which he inveighed against the world and himself—it possessed for her an indescribable charm. It represented her husband, besides, in what she loved to think his true character—that of a noble, enthusiastic man, eagerly bent upon benefiting his fellows. To her thinking, there was nothing of vanity—no overweening conceit in all these foreshadowings of future fame; nay, if anything, he understated the claims he would establish upon the world's gratitude.

With what eager delight, then, did she listen! how enchanting were the rich tones of his voice as he thus declaimed!

"How it cheers my heart, Herbert, when I hear you speak thus—how bright everything looks when you throw such sunlight around you!"

"'Is this the debauchee—is this the fellow we have been reading of in the reports from Scotland Yard?' methinks I

hear them whispering to each other. Ay, and that haughty University, ashamed of its old injustice, will stoop to share the lustre of the man it once expelled."

"Oh, think of the other and the better part of your triumph!" cried she, eagerly.

"The best part of all will be the vengeance on those who have wronged me. What will these calumniators say when it is a nation does homage to my success?"

"There are higher and better rewards than such feelings," said she, half-reproachfully.

"How little you know of it," said he in his tone of accustomed bitterness. "The really high and great rewards of England are given to wealth, to political intrigue, to legal success. It's your banker, your orator, or your scheming barrister, who win the great prizes in our State Lottery. Find out some secret by which life can be restored to the drowned, convert an atmosphere of pestilence into an air of health and vigour, discover how an avalanche may be arrested in its fall, and, if you be an Englishman, you can do nothing better with your knowledge than sell it to a company, and make it marketable through shareholders. Philanthropy can be quoted on 'Change like a Welsh tin-mine or a patent fuel company; and if you could raise the dead, make a 'limited liability' scheme of it before you tell the world your secret."

"Oh, Herbert, it was not thus you were wont to speak."

"No, Grace," said he, in a tone of gentle, sorrowful meaning, "but there is no such misanthrope as the man who despises himself." And with this he hastened to his room and locked the door. It was while carelessly and recklessly he scattered the harsh words by which he grieved her most that he now and then struck some chord that vibrated with a pang of almost anguish within him, uttering aloud some speech which from another he would have resented with a blow. Still, as the criminal is oftentimes driven to confess the guilt whose secret burden is too heavy for his heart, preferring even the execration of mankind to the terrible isolation of secrecy, so did he feel a sort of melancholy satisfaction in discovering how humbly and meanly he appeared before himself.

"A poor man's pack is soon made, Grace," said he, with a sad smile, as he entered the room, where she was busily engaged in the little preparations for his journey.

"Tom, don't go! don't go! don't!" screamed out the parrot, wildly.

"Only listen to the creature," said he; "he's at his warn-

ings again. I wish he would condescend to be more explanatory and less oracular."

She only smiled, without replying.

"Not but he was right once, Grace," said Layton, gravely. "You remember how he counselled me against that visit to the Rectory."

"Don't! don't!" croaked out the bird, in a low, guttural voice.

"You are too dictatorial, doctor, even for a vice-provost. I will go."

"All wrong! all wrong!" croaked the parrot.

"By Jove! he has half shaken my resolution," said Layton, as he sat down and drew his hand across his brow. "I wish any one would explain to me why it is that he who has all his life resented advice as insult, should be the slave of his belief in omens." This was uttered in a half-soliloquy, and he went on: "I can go back to at least a dozen events wherein I have had to rue or to rejoice in this faith."

"I too would say, Don't go, Herbert," said she, languidly.

"How foolish all this is!" said he, rising; "don't you know the old Spanish proverb, Grace, 'Good luck often sends us a message, but very rarely calls at the door, herself?' meaning that we must not ask Fortune to aid us without our contributing some effort of our own. I will go, Grace. Yes, I will go. No more auguries, doctor," said he, throwing a handkerchief playfully over the bird and then withdrawing it; a measure that never failed to enforce silence. "This time, at least," said he, "I mean to be my own oracle."

CHAPTER XII.

A FELLOW-TRAVELLER ON THE COACH.

The morning was raw, cold, and ungenial, as Layton took his outside seat on the coach for Dublin. For sake of shelter, being but poorly provided against ill weather, he had taken the seat behind the coachman, the place beside him being reserved for a traveller who was to be taken up outside the town. The individual in question was alluded to more than once by the driver and the guard as "the Captain," and in the abundance of fresh hay provided for his feet, and the care taken to keep his seat dry, there were signs of a certain importance being attached to his presence. As they gained the foot of a hill, where the road crossed a small bridge, they found the stranger awaiting them, with his carpet-bag; he had no other luggage, but in his own person showed unmistakable evidence of being well prepared for a journey. He was an elderly man, short, square, and thick-set, with a rosy, cheerful countenance, and a bright, merry eye. As he took off his hat, punctiliously returning the coachee's salute, he showed a round, bald head, fringed around the base by a curly margin of rich brown hair. So much Layton could mark; all signs, as he read them, of a jovial temperament and a healthy constitution; nor did the few words he uttered detract from the impression; they were frank and cheerful, and their tone rich and pleasing to the ear.

The stranger's first care on ascending to his place was to share a very comfortable rug with his neighbour, the civility being done in a way that would have made refusal almost impossible; his next move was to inquire if Layton was a smoker, and, even before the answer, came the offer of a most fragrant cigar. The courtesy of the offered snuff-box amongst our grandfathers is now replaced by the polite proffer of a cigar, and, simple as the act of attention is in itself, there are some men who are perfect masters in the performance. The captain was of this category; and although Layton was a cold, proud, off-standing man, such was the other's tact, that, before they had journeyed twenty miles in company, an actual intimacy had sprung up between them.

There is no pleasanter companionship to the studious and reading man than that of a man of life and the world, one whose experience, drawn entirely from the actual game of life, is full of incident and adventure. The captain had travelled a great deal and seen much, and there was about all his observations the stamp of a mind that had learned to judge men and things by broader, wider rules than are the guides of those who live in more narrow spheres.

It was in discoursing on the political condition of Ireland, that they reached the little village of Cookstown, about a mile from which, on a slight eminence, a neat cottage was observable, the trim laurel hedge that separated it from the road being remarkable in a country usually deficient in such foliage.

"A pretty spot," remarked Layton, carelessly, "and, to all seeming, untenanted."

"Yes, it seems empty," said the other, in the same easy tone.

"There's never been any one livin' there, captain, since *that*," said the coachman, turning round on his seat, and addressing the stranger.

"Since what?" asked Layton, abruptly.

"He is alluding to an old story—a very old story, now," rejoined the other. "There were two men—a father and son—named Shehan, taken from that cottage in the year of Emmet's unhappy rebellion, under a charge of high treason, and hanged."

"I remember the affair perfectly: Curran defended them. If I remember aright, too, they were convicted on the evidence of a noted informer."

"The circumstance is painfully impressed on my memory, by the fact that I have the misfortune to bear the same name; and it is by my rank alone that I am able to avoid being mistaken for him. My name is Holmes."

"To be sure," cried Layton, "Holmes was the name; Curran rendered it famous on that day."

The coachman had turned round to listen to this conversation, and at its conclusion touched his hat to the captain as if in polite acquiescence.

By the time they had reached Castle Blayney, such had been the captain's success in ingratiating himself into Layton's good opinion, that the doctor had accepted his invitation to dinner.

"We shall not dine with the coach travellers," whispered the stranger, "but at a small house I'll show you just close

by. I have already ordered my cutlet there, and there will be enough for us both."

Never was speech less boastful; a most admirable hot dinner was ready as they entered the little parlour, and such a bottle of port as Layton fancied he had never tasted the equal. By good luck, there was ample time to enjoy these excellent things, as the mail was obliged to await at this place for an hour or more the arrival of a cross-post. A second and a third brother of the same racy vintage succeeded, and Layton, warmed by the generous wine, grew open and confidential, not only in speaking of the past, but also to reveal all his hopes for the future, and the object of his journey. Though the captain was nothing less than a man of science, he could fathom sufficiently the details the other gave to see that the speaker was no ordinary man, and his discovery no small invention.

"Ay," said the doctor, as, carried away by the excitement of the wine, he grew boastful and vain, "you'll see, sir, that the man who sat shivering beside you on the outside of the mail without a great-coat to cover him, will, one of these days, be recognized as amongst the first of his nation, and along with Hunter, and Bell, and Brodie, will stand the name of Herbert Layton!"

"You had a very distinguished namesake once, a Fellow of Trinity——"

"Myself, sir, none other. I am the man!" cried he, in a burst of triumphant pride. "I am—that is, I was—the Regius Professor of Medicine; I was Gold Medallist in 18—; then Chancellor's Prizeman; the following year I beat Stack and Naper—you're heard of *them*, I'm sure, on the Fellowship bench; I carried away the Verse prize from George Wolffe; and now, this day—ay, sir, this day—I don't think I'd have eaten if you had not asked me to dine with you."

"Come, come," said the captain, pushing the decanter towards him, "there are good days coming. Even in a moneyed point of view, your discovery is worth some fifteen or twenty thousand pounds."

"I'd not sell it for a million; it shall be within the reach of the humblest peasant in the land the day I have perfected the details. It shall be for Parliament—the two Houses of the nation—to reward me, or I'll never accept a shilling."

"That's a very noble and high-spirited resolve. I like you for it—I respect you for it," said the Captain, warmly.

"I know well what had been my recognition if I had been born a German or a Frenchman. It is in England alone

scientific discovery brings neither advancement nor honour. They pension the informer that betrays his confederates, and they leave the man of intellect to die, as Chatterton died, of starvation in a garret. Isn't that true?"

"Too true—too true, indeed!" sighed the captain, mournfully.

"And as to the Ireland of long ago," said Layton, "how much more wise her present day rulers are than those who governed her in times past! and whose great difficulty was to deal with a dominant class, and to induce them to abate any of the pretensions which years of tried loyalty would seem to have confirmed into rights. I speak as one who was once a 'United Irishman,'" said he.

Laying down the glass he was raising to his lips, the captain leaned across the table and grasped Layton's hand, and although there was nothing in the gesture which a by-stander could have noticed, it seemed to convey a secret signal, for Layton cried out exultingly,—

"A brother in the cause!"

"You may believe how your frank, outspoken nature has won upon me," said he, "when I have confided to you a secret that would, if revealed, certainly cost me my commission, and might imperil my life; but I will do more, Layton, I will tell you that our fraternity exists in full vigour —not here, but thousands of miles away—and England will have to reap in India the wrongs she has sown in Ireland."

"With this I have no sympathy," burst in Layton, boldly. "Our association—at least, as I understood it—was to elevate and enfranchise Ireland, not humiliate England. It was well enough for Wolfe Tone and men of his stamp to take this view, but Nielson and myself were differently minded, and *we* deemed that the empire would be but the greater when all who served it were equals."

Was it that the moment was propitious—was it that Layton's persuasive power was at its highest—was it that the earnest zeal of the man had carried conviction with his words? however it happened, the captain, after listening to a long and well-reasoned statement, leaned his head thoughtfully on his hand, and said,—

"I wish I had known you in earlier days, Layton. You have placed these things before me in a point I have never seen them before, nor do I believe that there are ten men amongst us who have. Grant me a favour," said he, as if a sudden thought had just crossed him.

"What is it?" asked Layton.

"Come and stay a week or two with me at my little cottage at Glasnevin; I am a bachelor, and live that sort of secluded life that will leave you ample time for your own pursuits."

"Give me a corner for my glass bottles and a furnace, and I'm your man," said Layton, laughingly.

"You shall make a laboratory of anything but the dinner-room," cried Holmes, shaking hands on the compact, and thus sealing it.

The guard's horn soon after summoned them to their places, and they once more were on the road.

The men who have long waged a hand-to-hand combat with fortune, unfriended and uncheered, experience an intense enjoyment when comes the moment in which they can pour out all their sorrows and their selfishness into some confiding ear. It is no ordinary pleasure with them to taste the sympathy of a willing listener. Layton felt all the ecstasy of such a moment, and he told not alone of himself, and his plans, and his hopes, but of his son Alfred, what high gifts the youth possessed, and how certain was he, if common justice should be but accorded to him, to win a great place in the world's estimation.

"The captain" was an eager listener to all the other said, and never interrupted, save to throw in some passing word of encouragement, some cheering exhortation to bear up bravely and courageously.

Layton's heart warmed with the words of encouragement, and he confided many a secret source of hope that he had never revealed before. He told how, in the course of his labours, many an unexpected discovery had burst upon him; now, some great fact applicable to the smelting of metals; now some new invention available to agriculture. They were subjects, he owned, he had not pursued to any perfect result, but briefly committed to some rough notes, reserving them for a time of future leisure.

"And if I cannot convince the world," said he, laughingly, "that they have neglected and ignored a great genius, I hope, at least, to make *you* a convert to that opinion."

"You see those tall elms yonder?" said Holmes, as they drew nigh Dublin. "Well, screened beneath their shade lies the little cottage I have told you about. Quiet and obscure enough now, but I'm greatly mistaken if it will not one day be remembered as the spot were Herbert Layton lived when he brought his great discovery to completion."

"Do you really think so?" cried Layton, with a swelling

feeling about the heart as though it would burst his side. "Oh, if I could only come to feel that hope myself! How it would repay me for all I have gone through! How it would reconcile me to my own heart!"

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THEY LIVED AT THE VILLA.

The Heathcotes had prolonged their stay at Marlia a full month beyond their first intention. It was now November, and yet they felt most unwilling to leave it. To be sure, it was the November of Italy in one of its most favoured spots. The trees had scarcely begun to shed their leaves, and were only in that stage of golden and purple transition that showed the approach of winter. The grass was as green, and the dog-roses as abundant, as in May; indeed, it was May itself, only wanting the fire-flies and the violets. One must have felt the languor of an Italian summer, with its closed-shutter existence, its long days of reclusion, without exercise, without prospect, almost without light, to feel the intense delight a bright month of November can bring, with its pathways dry, its rivulets clear, its skies cloudless and blue—to be able to be about again, to take a fast canter or a brisk walk, is enjoyment great as the first glow of convalescence after sickness. Never are the olive-trees more silvery; never does the leafy fig, or the dark foliage of the orange, contrast so richly with its golden fruit. To enjoy all these was reason enough why the Heathcotes should linger there; at least, they said that was their reason, and they believed it. Layton, with his pupil, had established himself in the little city of Lucca, a sort of deserted, God-forgotten old place, with tumble-down palaces, with strange iron "grilles" and quaint old armorial shields over them; he said they had gone there to study, and *he* believed it.

Mr. O'Shea, was still a denizen of the Panini Hotel at the Bagni—from choice, he said, but *he* did not believe it; the

Morgans had gone back to Wales; Mr. Mosely to Bond Street; and Quackinboss was off to "do" his Etruscan cities, the "pottery, and the rest of it;" and so were they all scattered, Mrs. Penthony Morris and Clara being, however, still at the villa, only waiting for letters to set out for Egypt. Her visit had been prolonged by only the very greatest persuasions. "She knew well—too bitterly did she know—what a blank would life become to her when she had quitted the dear villa." "What a dreary awaking was in store for them." "What a sad reverse to poor Clara's bright picture of existence." "The dear child used to fancy it could be all like this!" "Better meet the misery at once than wait till they could not find strength to tear themselves away." Such-like were the sentiments uttered, sometimes tearfully, sometimes in a sort of playful sadness, always very gracefully, by the softest of voices, accompanied by the most downcast of long-fringed eyelids.

"I am sure I don't know how May will manage to live without her," said Charles, who, be it confessed, was thinking far more of his own sorrows than his cousin's; while he added, in a tone of well-assumed indifference, "We shall all miss her!"

"Miss her," broke in Sir William; "by George! her departure would create a blank in the society of a city, not to speak of a narrow circle in a remote country-house." As for May herself, she was almost heart-broken at the thought of separation. It was not alone the winning graces of her manner, and the numberless captivations she possessed, but that she had really such a "knowledge of the heart," she had given her such an insight into her own nature, that, but for her, she had never acquired; and poor May would shudder at the thought of the ignorance with which she had been about to commence the voyage of life, until she had fortunately chanced upon this skilful pilot. But for Mrs. Morris it was possible, nay, it was almost certain, she should one day or other have married Charles Heathcote—united herself to one in every way unsuited to her, "a good-tempered, easy-natured, indolent creature, with no high ambitions—a man to shoot and fish, and play billiards, and read French novels, but not the soaring intellect, not the high intelligence, the noble ascendancy of mind, that should win such a heart as yours, May." How strange it was that she should never before have recognized in Charles all the blemishes and shortcomings she now detected in his character! How singular that she had never remarked how selfish he was,

how utterly absorbed in his own pursuits, how little deference he had for the ways or wishes of others, and then, how abrupt, almost to rudeness, his manners! To be sure, part of this careless and easy indifference might be ascribed to a certain sense of security; "he knows you are betrothed to him, dearest; he is sure you must one day be his wife, or, very probably, he would be very different—more of an ardent suitor, more eager and anxious in his addresses. Ah, there it is! men are ever so, and yet they expect that we poor creatures are to accept that half fealty as a full homage, and be content with that small measure of affection they deign to accord us! That absurd Will has done it all, dear child. It is one of those contracts men make on parchment, quite forgetting that there are such things as human affections. You must marry him, and there's an end of it!"

Now, Charles, on his side, was very fond of his cousin. If he wasn't in love with her, it was because he didn't very well understand what being in love meant; he had a notion, indeed, that it implied giving up hunting and coursing, having no dogs, not caring for the Derby, or even opening *Punch* or smoking a cigar. Well, he could, he believed, submit to much, perhaps all, of these, but he couldn't, at least he didn't fancy he could, be "spooney." He came to Mrs. Morris with confessions of this kind, and she undertook to consider his case.

Lastly, there was Sir William to consult her about his son and his ward. He saw several nice and difficult points in their so-called engagement which would require the delicate hand of a clever woman; and where could he find one more to the purpose than Mrs. Penthony Morris?

With a skill all her own, she contrived to have confidential intercourse almost every day with each of the family. If she wished to see Sir William, it was only to pretend to write a letter, or look for some volume in the library, and she was sure to meet him. May was always in her own drawing-room, or the flower-garden adjoining it; and Charles passed his day rambling listlessly about the stables and the farm-yard, or watching the peasants at their work beneath the olive-trees. To aid her plans, besides, Clara could always be despatched to occupy and engage the intention of some other. Not, indeed, that Clara was as she used to be. Far from it. The merry, light-hearted, capricious child, with all her strange and wayward ways, was changed into a thoughtful, pensive girl, loving to be alone and unnoticed. So far from exhibiting her former dislike to study, she was now

intensely eager for it, passing whole days and great part of the night at her books. There was about her that purpose-like intentness that showed a firm resolve to learn. Nor was it alone in this desire for acquirement that she was changed, but her whole temper and disposition seemed altered. She had grown more gentle and more obedient. If her love of praise was not less, she accepted it with more graceful modesty, and appeared to feel it rather as a kindness than an acknowledged debt. The whole character of her looks, too, had altered. In place of the elfin sprightliness of her ever-laughing eyes, their expression was soft even to sadness; her voice, that once had the clear ringing of a melodious bell, had grown low, and with a tender sweetness that gave to each word a peculiar grace.

"What is the matter with Clara?" said Sir William, as he found himself, one morning, alone with Mrs. Morris in the library. "She never sings now, and she does not seem the same happy creature she used to be."

"Can you not detect the cause of this, Sir William?" said her mother, with a strange sparkle in her eyes.

"I protest I cannot. It is not, surely, that she is unhappy here?"

"No, no, very far from that."

"It cannot be ill health, for she is the very picture of the contrary."

"No, no," said her mother again.

"What can it be?"

"Say, rather, who?" broke in Mrs. Morris, "and I'll tell you."

"Who, then? Tell me by all means."

"Mr. Layton. Yes, Sir William, this is *his* doing. I have remarked it many a day back. You are aware, of course, how sedulously he endeavours to make himself acceptable in another quarter?"

"What do you mean? What quarter? Surely you do not allude to my ward?"

"You certainly do not intend me to believe that you have not seen this, Sir William?"

"I declare not only that I have never seen, but never so much as suspected it. And have *you* seen it, Mrs. Morris?"

"Ah! Sir William, this is our woman's privilege, though really in the present case it did not put the faculty to any severe test."

For a moment or two he made no reply, and then said, "And Charles—has Charles remarked it?"

"I really cannot tell you. His manner is usually so easy and indifferent about everything, that, whether it comes of not seeing or never caring, I cannot pretend to guess."

"I asked the young man here, because he was with Lord Agincourt," began Sir William, who was most eager to offer some apologies to himself for any supposed indiscretion. "Agincourt's guardian, Lord Sommerville, and myself have had some unpleasant passages in life, and I wished to show the boy that towards *him* I bore no memory of the ills I received from his uncle. In fact, I was doubly civil and attentive on that account; but as for Mr. Layton—isn't that his name?"—

"Yes; Alfred Layton."

"— Layton came as the lad's tutor—nothing more. He appeared a pleasing, inoffensive, well-bred young fellow. But surely, Mrs. Morris, my ward has given him no encouragement?"

"Encouragement is a strong word, Sir William," said she, smiling archly; "I believe it is only widows who give encouragement?"

"Well, well," said he hurriedly, and not caring to smile, for he was in no jesting mood, "has she appeared to understand his attentions?"

"Even young ladies make no mistakes on that score," said she, in the same bantering tone.

"And I never to see it!" exclaimed he, as he walked hurriedly to and fro. "But I ought to have seen it, eh, Mrs. Morris?—I ought to have seen it. I ought, at least, to have suspected that these fellows are always on the look-out for such a chance as this. Now I suppose you'll laugh at me for the confession, but my attention was entirely engaged by watching our Irish friend."

"The great O'Shea!" exclaimed Mrs. Morris, laughing.

"And, to tell you the truth, I never could exactly satisfy myself whether he came here to ogle my ward, or win Charley's half-crowns at billards."

"I imagine, if you asked him, he'd say he was in for the 'double event,'" said she, with a laugh.

"And then, Mrs. Morris," added he, with a sly smile, "if I must be candid, I fancied, or thought I fancied, his attentions had another object."

"Towards *me!*" said she, calmly, but in an accent as honest, as frank, and as free from all concern, as though speaking of a third person. "Oh, that is quite true. Mr. Layton also made his little quiet love to me as college men

do it, and I accepted the homage of both, feeling that I was a sort of lightning-conductor that might rescue the rest of the building."

Sir William laughed as much at the arch quietness of her manner as her words. "How blind I have been all this time," burst he in, angrily, as he reverted to the subject of his chagrin. "I suppose there's not another man living would not have seen this but myself."

"No, no," said she, gently; "men are never nice observers in these matters."

"Well, better late than never, eh, Mrs. Morris. Better to know it even now. Forewarned—as the adage says—eh?"

In these little broken sentences he sought to comfort himself, while he angled for some consolation from his companion; but she gave him none—not a word, nor a look, nor a gesture.

"Of course I shall forbid him the house."

"And make a hero of him from that moment, and a martyr of her," quietly replied she. "By such a measure as this you would at once convert what may be possibly a passing flirtation into a case of love."

"So that I am to leave the course free, and give him every opportunity to prosecute his suit?"

"Not exactly. But do not erect barriers just high enough to be surmounted. Let him come here just as usual, and I will try if I cannot entangle him in a little serious flirtation with myself, which certainly, if it succeed, will wound May's pride, and cure her of any weakness for him."

Sir William made no reply, but he stared at the speaker with a sort of humorous astonishment, and somehow her cheek flushed under the look.

"These are womanish artifices, which you men hold cheaply, of course; but little weapons suit little wars, Sir William, and such are our campaigns. At all events, count upon my aid till Monday next."

"And why not after?"

"Because the Peninsular and Oriental packet touches at Malta on Saturday, and Clara and I must be there in time to catch it."

"Oh no; we cannot spare you. In fact, we are decided on detaining you. May would break up house here and follow you to the Pyramids—the Upper Cataracts—anywhere, in short. But leave us you must not."

She covered her face with her handkerchief, and never spoke, but a slight motion of her shoulders showed that she

was sobbing. "I have been so uncandid with you all this time," said she, in broken accents. "I should have told you all—everything. I ought to have confided to you the whole sad story of my terrible bereavement and its consequences; but I could not. No, Sir William, I could not endure the thought of darkening the sunshine of all the happiness I saw here by the cloud of my sorrows. When I only saw faces of joy around me, I said to my heart, 'What right have I, in my selfishness, to obtrude here?' And then, again, I bethought me, 'Would they admit me thus freely to their hearth and home if they knew the sad, sad story?' In a word," said she, throwing down the handkerchief, and turning towards him with soft and tearful eyes, "I could not risk the chance of losing your affection, for you might have censured, you might have thought me too unforgiving—too relentless!"

Here she again bent down her head, and was lost in an access of fresh afflictions.

Never was an elderly gentleman more puzzled than Sir William. He felt that he ought to offer consolation, but of what nature, or for what calamity, he couldn't even guess. It was an awkward case altogether, and he never fancied awkward cases at any time. Then he had that unchivalric sentiment that elderly gentlemen occasionally will have—a sort of half distrust of "injured women." This was joined to a sense of shame that it was usually supposed by the world men of his time of life were always the ready victims of such sympathies. In fact, he disliked the situation immensely, and could only muster a few commonplace remarks to extricate himself from it.

"You'll let me tell you everything; I know you will," said she, looking bewitchingly soft and tender through her tears.

"Of course I will, my dear Mrs. Morris, but not now—not to-day. You really are not equal to it at this moment."

"True, I am not!" said she, drying her eyes; "but it is a promise, and you'll not forget it."

"You only do me honour in the confidence," said he, kissing her hand.

"A thousand pardons!" cried a rich brogue. And at the same moment the library door was closed, and the sound of retreating steps was heard along the corridor.

"That insufferable O'Shea!" exclaimed she. "What will he not say of us?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BILLIARD-ROOM.

Mr. O'Shea had a very happy knack at billiards. It was an accomplishment which had stood him more in stead in life than even his eloquence in the House, his plausibility in the world, or his rose-amethyst ring. That adventurous category of mankind, who have, as Curran phrased it, "the title-deeds of their estates under the crown of their hats," must, out of sheer necessity, cultivate their natural gifts to a higher perfection than that well-to-do, easy-living class for whom Fortune has provided "land and beeves," and are obliged to educate hand, eye, and hearing to an amount of artistic excellence of which others can form no conception. Now, just as the well-trained singer can modulate his tones, suiting them to the space around him, or as the orator so pitches his voice as to meet the ears of his auditory, without any exaggerated effort, so did the Member for Inch measure out his skill, meting it to the ability of his adversary with a graduated nicety as delicate as that of a chemist in apportioning the drops of a precious medicament.

It was something to see him play. There was a sort of lounging elegance—a half purpose-like energy, dashed with indolence—a sense of power, blended with indifference—a something that bespoke the caprice of genius, mingled with a spirit that seemed to whisper that, after all, "cannons" were only vanity, and "hazards" themselves but vexation of spirit. He was, though a little past his best years, a good-looking fellow—a thought too pluffy, perhaps, and more than a thought too swaggering and pretentious; but, somehow, these same attributes did not detract from the display of certain athletic graces of which the game admits, for, after all, it was only Antinous fallen a little into flesh, and seen in his waistcoat.

It was mainly to this accomplishment he owed the invitations he received to the villa. Charles Heathcote, fully convinced of his own superiority at the game, was piqued and irritated at the other's success; while Sir William was, perhaps, not sorry that his son should receive a slight lesson

on the score of his self-esteem, particularly where the price should not be too costly. The billiard-room thus became each evening the resort of all in the villa. Thither May Leslie fetched her work, and Mrs. Morris her crochet needles, and Clara her book; while around the table itself were met young Heathcote, Lord Agincourt, O'Shea, and Layton. Of course the stake they played for was a mere trifle—a mere nominal prize, rather intended to record victory than reward the victors—just as certain taxes are maintained more for statistics than revenue—and half-crowns changed hands without costing the loser an after-thought; so at least the spectators understood, and all but one believed. Her quiet and practised eye, however, detected in Charles Heathcote's manner something more significant than the hurt pride of a beaten player, and saw under all the external show of O'Shea's indifference a purpose-like energy, little likely to be evoked for a trifling stake. Under the pretext of marking the game, a duty for which she had offered her services, she was enabled to watch what went forward without attracting peculiar notice, and she could perceive how, from time to time, Charles and O'Shea would exchange a brief word as they passed—sometimes a monosyllable, sometimes a nod—and at such times the expression of Heathcote's face would denote an increased anxiety and irritation. It was while thus watching one evening, a chance phrase she overheard confirmed all her suspicions—it was while bending down her head to show some peculiar stitch to May Leslie that she brought her ear to catch what passed.

"This makes three hundred," whispered Charles.

"And fifty," rejoined O'Shea, as cautiously.

"Nothing of the kind," answered Charles, angrily.

"You'll find I'm right," said the other, knocking the balls about to drown the words. "Are you for another game?" asked he aloud.

"No; I've had enough of it," said Charles, impatiently, as he drew out his cigar-case—trying to cover his irritation by searching for a cigar to his liking.

"I'm your man, Inch-o'-brogue," broke in Agincourt; for it was by this impertinent travesty of the name of his borough he usually called him.

"What, isn't the pocket-money all gone yet?" said the other, contemptuously.

"Not a bit of it, man. Look at that," cried he, drawing forth a long silk purse, plumply filled. "There's enough to pay off the mortgage on an Irish estate, I'm sure!"

While these freedoms were being interchanged, Charles Heathcote had left the room, and strolled out into the garden. Mrs. Morris, affecting to go in search of something for her work, took occasion also to go; but no sooner had she escaped form the room than she followed him.

Why was it, can any one say, that May Leslie bestowed more than ordinary attention on the game at this moment, evincing an interest in it she had never shown before? Mr. O'Shea had given the young Marquis immense odds; but he went further, he played off a hundred little absurdities to increase the other's chances—he turned his back to the table—he played with his left hand—he poked the balls without resting his cue—he displayed the most marvellous dexterity, accomplishing hazards that seemed altogether beyond all calculation; for all crafty and subtle as he was, vanity had got the mastery over him, and his self-conceit rose higher and higher with every astonished expression of the pretty girl who watched him. While May could not restrain her astonishment at his skill, O'Shea's efforts to win her praise redoubled.

"I'll yield to no man in a game of address," said he, boastfully: "to ride across country, to pull a boat, to shoot, fish, fence, or swim—— There, my noble Marquis, drop your tin into that pocket and begin another game. I'll give you eighty-five out of a hundred."

"Isn't he what Quackinboss would call a 'ternal swaggerer, May?" cried Agincourt.

"He is a most brilliant billiard-player," said May, smiling courteously, with a glance towards the recess of the window, where Layton was leaning over Clara's chair and reading out of the book she held in her hand. "How I wish you would give me some lessons," added she, still slyly stealing a look at the window.

"Charmed—only too happy. You overwhelm me with the honour, Miss Leslie, and my name is not O'Shea if I do not make you an admirable player, for I've remarked already you have great correctness of eye."

"Indeed!"

"Astonishing; and with that, a wonderfully steady hand."

"How you flatter me."

"Flatter? ah, you little know me, Miss Leslie!" said he, as he passed before her.

May blushed, for at that moment Layton had lifted his eyes from the book and turned them full upon her. So steadfastly did he continue to look, that her cheek grew hotter and

redder, and a something like resentment seemed to possess her; while he, as though suddenly conscious of having in some degree committed himself, held down his head in deep confusion.

May Leslie arose from her seat, and, with a haughty toss of her head, drew nigh the table.

"Are you going to join us, May?" cried the boy, merrily.

"I'm going to take my first lesson, if Mr. O'Shea will permit me," said she; but the tone of her voice vibrated less with pleasure than resentment.

"I'm at my lessons, too, May," cried Clara, from the window. "Is it not kind of him to help me?"

"Most kind—most considerate!" said May, abruptly; and then, throwing down the cue on the table, she said, "I fancy I have a headache. I hope you'll excuse me for the present." And almost ere Mr. O'Shea could answer, she had left the room. Clara speedily followed her, and for a minute or two not a word was uttered by the others.

"I move that the house be counted," cried the Member for Inch. "What has come over them all this evening? Do *you* know, Layton?"

"Do *I* know? Know what?" cried Alfred, trying to arouse himself out of a reverie.

"Do you know that Inch-o'-brogue has not left me five shillings out of my last quarter's allowance?" said the boy.

"You must pay for your education, my lad," said O'Shea. "I didn't get mine for nothing. Layton there can teach you longs and shorts, to scribble nonsense-verses, and the like, but for the real science of life, 'how to do *them* as has done *you*,' you must come to fellows like me."

"Yes, there is much truth in *that*," said Layton, who, not having heard one word the other had spoken corroborated all of it, out of pure distraction of mind.

The absurdity was too strong for Agincourt and O'Shea, and they both laughed out. "Come," said O'Shea, slapping Layton on the shoulder, "wake up, and roll the balls about. I'll play you your own game, and give you five-and-twenty odds. There's a sporting offer!"

"Make it to *me*," broke in Agincourt.

"So I would, if you weren't pumped out, my noble Marquis."

"And could you really bring yourself to win a boy's pocket-money—a mere boy?" said Layton, now suddenly aroused to full consciousness, and coming so close to O'Shea as to be inaudible to the other.

"Smallest contributions thankfully received, is *my* motto," said O'Shea. "Not but, as a matter of education, the youth has gained a deuced sight more from *me* than *you!*"

"The reproach is just," said Layton, bitterly. "I *have* neglected my trust—grossly neglected it—and in nothing more than suffering him to keep *your* company."

"Oh! is that your tone?" whispered the other, still lower. "Thank your stars for it, you never met a man more ready to humour your whim."

"What's the 'Member' plotting?" said Agincourt, coming up between them. "Do let *me* into the plan."

"It is something he wishes to speak to *me* about to-morrow at eleven o'clock," said Layton, with a significant look at O'Shea, "and which is a matter strictly between ourselves."

"All right," said Agincourt, turning back to the table again, while O'Shea, with a nod of assent, left the room.

"We must set to work vigorously to-morrow, Henry," said Layton, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder. "You have fallen into idle ways, and the fault is all my own. For both our sakes, then, let us amend it."

"Whatever you like, Alfred," said the boy, turning on him a look of real affection; "only never blame yourself if you don't make a genius of me. I was always a stupid dog!"

"You are a true-hearted English boy," muttered Layton, half to himself, "and well deserved to have fallen into more careful hands than mine. Promise me, however, all your efforts to repair the past."

"That I will," said he, grasping the other's hand, and shaking it in token of his pledge. "But I still think," said he, in a slightly broken voice, "they might have made a sailor of me; they'll never make a scholar!"

"We must get away—we must leave this," said Layton, speaking half to himself.

"I'm sorry for it," replied the boy. "I like the old villa, and I like Sir William and Charley, and the girls, too! Ay, and I like that trout stream under the alders, and that jolly bit of grass land where we have just put up the hurdles. I say, Layton," added he, with a sigh, "I wonder when shall we be as happy as we have been here?"

"Who knows?" said Layton, sorrowfully.

"I'm sure *I* never had such a pleasant time of it in my life. Have you?"

"*I?*—I don't know—that is, I believe not. I mean, never," stammered out Layton, in confusion.

"Ha! I fancied as much. I thought you didn't like it as well as *I* did."

"Why so?" asked Layton, eagerly.

"It was May put it into my head the other morning. She said it was downright cruelty to make you come out and stop here; that you couldn't, with all your politeness, conceal how much the place bored you!"

"She said this?"

"Yes; and she added, that if it were not for Clara, with her German lessons and her little Venetian barcarolles, you would have been driven to desperation."

"But you could have told her, Henry, that I delighted in this place—that I never had passed such happy days as here."

"I did think so when we knew them first, but latterly it seemed to me that you were somehow sadder and graver than you used to be. You didn't like to ride with us; you seldom came down to the river; you'd pass all the morning in the library; and, as May said, you only seemed happy when you were giving Clara her lesson in German."

"And to whom did May say this?"

"To me and to Clara."

"And Clara—did she make any answer?"

"Not a word. She got very pale, and seemed as though she would burst out a-crying. Heaven knows why! Indeed, I'm not sure the tears weren't in her eyes as she hurried away; and it was the only day I ever saw May Leslie cross."

"*I* never saw her so," said Layton, half rebukefully.

"Then you didn't see her on that day, that's certain! She snubbed Charley about his riding, and wouldn't suffer Mrs. Morris to show her something that had gone wrong in her embroidery; and when we went down to the large drawing-room to rehearse our tableau—that scene you wrote for us—she refused to take a part, and said, 'Get Clara; she'll do it better!'"

"And it was thus our little theatricals fell to the ground," said Layton, musingly; "and I never so much as suspected all this!"

"Well," said the boy, with a hesitating manner, "I believe I ought not to have told you. I'm sure she never intended I should; but somehow, after our tiff——"

"And did *you* quarrel with her?" asked Layton, eagerly.

"Not quarrel exactly; but it was what our old commander used to call a false-alarm fire; for I thought her unjust and unfair towards you, and always glad when she could lay something or other to your charge, and I said so to her frankly."

"And she?"

"She answered me roundly enough. 'When you are a little older, young gentleman,' said she, 'you'll begin to discover that our likings and dislikings are not always under our own control.' She tried to be very calm and cool as she said it, but she was as pale as if going to faint before she finished."

"She said truly," muttered Layton to himself; "our impulses are but the shadows our vices or virtues throw before them.' Then laying his arm on the boy's shoulder, he led him away, to plan and plot out a future course of study, and repair all past negligence and idleness.

Ere we leave this scene, let us follow Mrs. Morris, who, having quitted the house, quickly went in search of Charles Heathcote. There was that in the vexed and angry look of the young man, as he left the room, that showed her how easy it would be in such a moment to become his confidante. Through the traits of his resentment she could read an impatience that could soon become indiscretion. "Let me only be the repository of any secret of his mind," muttered she—"I care not what—and I ask nothing more. If there be one door of a house open—be it the smallest—it is enough to enter by."

She had not to go far in her search. There was a small raised terrace at the end of the garden—a favourite spot with him—and thither she had often herself repaired to enjoy the secret luxury of a cigar—for Mrs. Morris smoked whenever opportunity permitted that indulgence without the hazard of forfeiting the good opinion of such as might have held the practice in disfavour. Now, Charles Heathcote was the only confidant of this weakness, and the mystery, small as it was, had served to establish a sort of bond between them.

"I knew I should find you here," said she, stealing noiselessly to his side, as, leaning over the terrace, he stood deep in thought. "Give me a cigar."

He took the case slowly from his pocket, and held it towards her in silence.

"How vastly polite! Choose one for me, sir," said she, pettishly.

"They're all alike," said he, carelessly, as he drew one from the number, and offered it.

"And now a light," said she, "for I see yours has gone out, without your knowing it. Pray do mind what you're doing; you've let the match fall on my foot. Look there!"

And he did look, and saw the prettiest foot and roundest ankle that ever Parisian coquetry had done its uttermost to

grace; but he only smiled, half languidly, and said, "There's no mischief done—to either of us!" the last words being muttered to himself. Her sharp ears, however, had caught them; and had he looked at her then, he would have seen her face a deep crimson. "Is the play over? Have they left the billiard-room?" asked he.

"Of course it is over," said she, mockingly. "Sportsmen rarely linger in the preserves where there is no game."

"What do you think of that same Mr. O'Shea? You rarely mistake people. Tell me frankly your opinion of him," said he, abruptly.

"He plays billiards far better than *you*," said she, dryly.

"I'm not talking of his play, I'm asking what you think of him."

"He's your master at whist, écarté, and piquet. I *think* he's a better pistol shot; and he says he rides better."

"I defy him. He's a boastful, conceited fellow. Take his own account, and you'll not find his equal anywhere. But still, all this is no answer to my question."

"Yes, but it is, though. When a man possesses a very wide range of small accomplishments in a high degree of perfection, I always take it for granted that he lives by them."

"Just what I thought—exactly what I suspected," broke he in, angrily. "I don't know how we ever came to admit him here, as we have. That passion May has for opening the doors to every one has done it all."

"If people will have a menagerie, they must make up their mind to meet troublesome animals, now and then," said she, dryly.

"And then," resumed he, "the absurdity is, if I say one word, the reply is, 'Oh, you are so jealous!'"

"Naturally enough!" was the cool remark.

"Naturally enough! And why naturally enough? Is it of such fellows as Layton or O'Shea I should think of being jealous?"

"I think you might," said she, gravely. "They are, each of them, very eager to succeed in that about which you show yourself sufficiently indifferent; and although May is certainly bound by the terms of her father's will, there are conditions by which she can purchase her freedom."

"Purchase her freedom! And is that the way she regards her position?" cried he, trembling with agitation.

"Can you doubt it? Need you do more than ask yourself; How do you look on your own case? And yet you are not

going to bestow a great fortune. I'm certain, that do what you will, your heart tells you it is a slave's bargain."

"Did May tell you so?" said he, in a voice thick with passion.

"No."

"Did she ever hint as much?"

"No."

"Do you believe that any one ever dared to say it?"

"As to that, I can't say; the world is very daring, and says a great many naughty things, without much troubling itself about their correctness."

"It may spare its censure on the present occasion, then."

"Is it that you will not exact her compliance?"

"I will not."

"How well I read you," cried she, catching up his cold and still reluctant hand between both her own—"how truly I understood your noble, generous nature. It was but yesterday I was writing about you to a very dear friend, who had asked me when the marriage was to take place, and I said, 'If I have any skill in deciphering character, I should say, Never. Charles Heathcote is not the man to live a pensioner on a wife's rental; he is far more likely to take service again as a soldier, and win a glorious name amongst those who are now reconquering India. His daring spirit chafes against the inglorious idleness of his present life, and I'd not wonder any morning to see his place vacant at the breakfast-table, and to hear he had sailed for Alexandria.'"

"You do me a fuller justice than many who have known me longer," said he, pensively.

"Because I read you more carefully—because I considered you without any disturbing element of self-interest; and if I was now and then angry at the lethargic indolence of your daily life, I used to correct myself and say, 'Be patient; his time is coming; and when the hour has once struck for him, he'll dally no longer!'"

"And my poor father——"

"Say, rather, your proud father, for he is the man to appreciate your noble resolution, and feel proud of his son."

"But to leave him—to desert him——"

"It is no eternal separation. In a year or two you will rejoin him, never to part again. Take my word for it, the consciousness that his son is accomplishing a high duty will be a strong fund of consolation for absence. It is to mistake him to suppose that he could look on your present life without deep regret."

"Ah! is that so?" cried he, with an expression of pain.

"He has never owned as much to me; but I have read it in him, just as I have read in *you* that you are not the man to stoop to an ignominious position to purchase a life of ease and luxury."

"You were right there!" said he, warmly.

"Of course I was. I could not be mistaken."

"You shall not be, at all events," said he, hurriedly. "How cold your hand is! Let us return to the house." And they walked back in silence to the door.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. PENTHONY MORRIS AT HER WRITING-TABLE.

It was late on that same night—very late. The villa was all quiet and noiseless as Mrs. Morris sat at her writing-table, engaged in a very long letter. The epistle does not in any way enter into our story. It was to her father, in reply to one she had just received from him, and solely referred to little family details with which our reader can have no interest, save in a passing reference to a character already before him, and of whom she thus wrote:—

"And so your alchemist turns out to be the father of my admirer, Mr. Alfred Layton. I can sincerely say your part of the family is the more profitable, for I should find it a very difficult problem to make five hundred pounds out of mine! Nor can I sufficiently admire the tact with which you rescued even so much from such a wreck! I esteem your cleverness the more, since—shall I confess it, dear papa?—I thought, that the man of acids and alkalies would turn out to be the rogue and you the dupe! Let me hasten, therefore, to make the *amende honorable*, and compliment you on your new character of chemist.

"In your choice, too, of the mode of disembarrassing yourself of his company, you showed an admirable wisdom; and you very justly observe, these are not times when giving a

dog a bad name will save the trouble of hanging him, otherwise an exposure of his treasonable principles might have sufficed. Far better was the method you selected, while, by making *him* out to be mad, you make *yourself* out to be benevolent. You have caught, besides, a very popular turn of the public mind at a lucky conjuncture. There is quite a vogue just now for shutting up one's mother-in-law, or one's wife, or any other disagreeable domestic ingredient, on the plea of insanity; and a very clever physician, with what is called 'an ingenious turn of mind' will find either madness or arsenic in any given substance. You will, however, do wisely to come abroad, for the day will come of a reaction, and 'the lock-up' system will be converted into the 'let-loose,' and a sort of doomsday arrive when one will be confronted with very unwelcome acquaintances."

As she had written thus far, a very gentle voice at her door whispered, "May I come in, dearest?"

"Oh, darling, is it you?" cried Mrs. Morris, throwing a sheet of paper over her half-written epistle. "I was just writing about you. My sweet May, I have a dear old godmother down in Devonshire who loves to hear of those who love *me;* and it is such a pleasure, besides, to write about those who are happy."

"And you call me one of them, do you?" said the girl, with a deep sigh.

"I call you one who has more of what makes up happiness than any I have ever known. You are very beautiful—nay, no blushing, it is a woman says it—so handsome, May, that it is downright shame of Fortune to have made you rich too. You should have been left to your beauty, as other people are left to their great connections, or their talents, or their Three per Cents.; and then you are surrounded by those who love you, May—a very commendable thing in a world which has its share of disagreeable people; and, lastly, to enjoy all these fair gifts, you have got youth."

"I shall be nineteen on the fourth of next month, Lucy," said the other, gravely; and it was just about that very circumstance that I came to speak to you."

Mrs. Morris knew thoroughly well what the speech portended, but she looked all innocence and inquiry.

"You are aware, Lucy, what my coming of age brings with it?" said the girl, half pettishly.

"That you become a great millionaire, dearest—a sort of female Rothschild, with funds and stocks in every land of the earth."

"I was not speaking of money. I was alluding to the necessity of deciding as to my own fate in life. I told you that by my father's will I am bound to declare that I accept or reject Charles Heathcote within six months after my coming of age."

"I do not, I confess, see anything very trying in that, May. I conclude that you know enough of your own mind to say whether you like him or not. You are not strangers to each other. You have been domesticated together——"

"That's the very difficulty," broke in May. "There has been intimacy between us, but nothing like affection—familiarity enough, but no fondness."

"Perhaps that's not so bad a feature as you deem it," said the other, dryly. "Such a tame, table-land prospect before marriage may all the better prepare you for the dull uniformity of wedded life."

May gave a slight sigh, and was silent, while the other continued,—

"Being very rich, dearest, is, of course, a great resource, for you can, by the mere indulgence of your daily caprices, give yourself a sort of occupation, and a kind of interest in life."

May sighed again, and more heavily.

"I know this is not what one dreams of, my dear May," resumed she, "and I can well imagine how reluctant you are to seek happiness in toy terriers or diamond earrings; but remember what I told you once before was the great lesson the world taught us, that every joy we compass in this life is paid for dearly, in some shape or other, and that the system is one great scheme of compensations, the only wisdom being, to be sure you have got at last what you have paid for."

"I remember your having said that," said May, thoughtfully.

"Yes; it was in correction of a great mistake you had made, May, when you were deploring the fate of some one who had contracted an unequal marriage. It was then that I ventured to tell you, that what the world calls a misalliance is the one sure throw for a happy union."

"But you didn't convince me!" said May, hastily.

"Possibly not. I could not expect you to look on life from the same sad eminence I have climbed to; still I think you understood me when I showed you that as air and sunlight are blessings which we enjoy without an effort, so affection, gained without sacrifice, elicits no high sense of

self-esteem—none of that self-love, which is but the reflex of real love."

"Charles would, then, according to your theory, be eminently happy in marrying *me*, for to all appearance, the sacrifice would be considerable," said May, with a half bitter laugh.

"*My* theory only applies to *us*, dear May; as for men, they marry from a variety of motives, all prompted by some one or other feature of their selfishness: this one for fortune, that for family influence, the other because he wants a home, and so on."

"And not for love, at all?" broke in May.

"Alas! dearest, the man who affords himself the pleasure of being in love is almost always unable to indulge in any other luxury. It is your tutor creature, there, like Layton, falls in love!"

May smiled, and turned away her head; but the crimson flush of her cheek soon spread over her neck, and Mrs. Morris saw it.

"Yes," resumed she, as if reflecting aloud, "love is the one sole dissipation of these student men, and so to say, it runs through the dull-coloured woof of their whole after-life, like a single gold thread glittering here and there at long intervals, and it gives them those dreamy fits of imaginative bliss which their quiet helpmates trustfully ascribe to some intellectual triumph. And it is in these the poor curate forgets his sermon, and the village doctor his patient, thinking of some moss-rose he had plucked long ago!"

"Do you believe that, Loo?" asked the girl, eagerly.

"I know it, dear; and what's more, it is these very men are the best of husbands, the kindest and the tenderest. The perfume of an early love keeps the heart pure for many a long year after. Let us take Layton, for instance."

"But why Mr. Layton? What do we know about him?"

"Not much, certainly; but enough to illustrate our meaning. It is quite clear he is desperately in love."

"With whom, pray?" asked May. And her face became crimson as she spoke.

"With a young lady who cannot speak of him without blushing," said Mrs. Morris, calmly; and continued: "At first sight it does seem a very cruel thing to inspire such a man with a hopeless passion, yet, on second thought, we see what a stream of sunlight this early memory will throw over the whole bleak landscape of his after-life. You are his torture now, but you will be his benefactor in many a dark hour

of the dreary pilgrimage before him. There will be touches of tenderness in that ode he'll send to the magazine; there will be little spots of sweet melancholy in that village story; men will never know whence they found their way into the curate's heart. How little aware are they that there's a corner there for old memories, embalmed amongst holier thoughts—a withered rose-leaf between the pages of a prayer-book!"

May again sighed, and with a tremor in the cadence that was almost a sob.

"So that," resumed the other, in a more flippant voice, "you can forgive yourself for your present cruelty, by thinking of all the benefits you are to bestow hereafter, and all this without robbing your rightful lord of one affection, one solitary emotion, he has just claim to. And that, my sweet May, is more than you can do with your worldly wealth, for, against every cheque you send your banker, the cashier's book will retain the record."

"You only confuse me with all this," said May, pettishly. "I came for counsel."

"And I have given you more—I have given you consolation. I wish any one would be as generous with *me!*"

"Oh, you are not angry with me!" cried the girl, earnestly.

"Angry! no, dearest; a passing moment of selfish regret is not anger, but it is of *you*, not of *me*, I would speak; tell me everything. Has Charles spoken to you?"

"Not a word. It may be indifference, or it may be that, in a sense of security about the future, he does not care to trouble himself."

"Nay, scarcely that," said the other, thoughtfully.

"Whatever the cause, you will own it is not very flattering to *me*," said she, flushing deeply.

"And Mr. Layton—is *he* possessed of the same calm philosophy? Has he the same trustful reliance on destiny," said Mrs. Morris, who, apparently examining the lace border of her handkerchief, yet stole a passing glance at the other's face.

"How can you ask such a question? What is *he* to *me*, or *I* to *him?* If he ever thought of me, besides, he must have remembered that the difference of station between us presents an insurmountable objection."

"As if Love asked for anything better," cried Mrs. Morris, laughingly. "Why, dearest, the passion thrives on insurmountable objections, just the way certain fish swallow stones, not for nutriment, but to aid digestion by a difficulty. If he be the man I take him for, he must hug an obstacle to his

heart as a Heaven-sent gift. Be frank with me, May," said she, passing her arm affectionately round her waist; "confess honestly that he told you as much."

"No; he never said that," muttered she, half reluctantly. "What he said was, that if disparity of condition was the only barrier between us—if he were sure, or if he could even hope, that worldly success could open an avenue to my heart——"

"That he'd go and be Prime Minister of England next session.

'If doughty deeds
My lady please!'

That was his tone, was it? Oh, dear! and I fancied the man had something new or original about him. Truth is, dearest, it is in love as in war—there are nothing but the same old weapons to fight with, and we are lost or won just as our great-great-grandmothers were before us."

"I wish you would be serious, Lucy," said the girl, half rebukefully.

"Don't you know me well enough by this time to perceive that I am never more thoughtful than in what seems my levity? and this on principle, too, for, in the difficulties of life, Fancy will occasionally suggest a remedy Reason had never hit upon, just as sportsmen will tell you that a wild, untrained spaniel will often flush a bird a more trained dog had never 'marked.' And now, to be most serious, you want to choose between the eligible man who is sure of you, and the most unequal suitor who despairs of his success. Is not that your case?"

May shook her head dissentingly.

"Well, it is sufficiently near the issue for our purpose. Not so? Come, then, I'll put it differently. You are balancing whether to refuse your fortune to Charles Heathcote or yourself to Alfred Layton; and my advice is, do both."

May grew very pale, and, after an effort to say something, was silent.

"Yes, dearest, between the man who never pledges to pay, and him who offers a bad promissory note, there is scant choice, and I'd say, take neither."

"I know how it will wound my dear old guardian, who loves me like a daughter," began May. But the other broke in,—

"Oh! there are scores of things one can do in life to oblige one's friends, but marriage is not one of them. And then,

bethink you, May, how little you have seen of the world; and surely there is a wider choice before you than between a wearied lounger on half-pay and a poor tutor."

"Yes; a poor tutor if you will, but of a name and family the equal of my own," said May, hastily, and with a dash of temper in the words.

"Who says so? Who has told you that?"

"He himself. He told me that though there were some painful circumstances in his family history he would rather not enter upon, that in point of station he yielded to none in the rank of untitled gentry. He spoke of his father as a man of the very highest powers."

"Did he tell you what station he occupied at this moment?"

"No. And do you know it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Morris, gravely.

"Will you not tell me, Lucy?" asked May, eagerly.

"No; there is not any reason that I should. You have just said, 'What is Mr. Layton to me, or I to him?' and in the face of such a confession why should I disparage him?"

"So, then, the confession would disparage him?"

"It might."

"This reserve is not very generous towards me, I must say," said the girl, passionately.

"It is from generosity to you that I maintain it," said the other, coldly.

"But if I were to tell you that the knowledge interests me deeply; that by it I may, possibly, be guided in a most eventful decision?"

"Oh, if you mean to say, 'Alfred Layton has asked me to marry him, and my reply depends upon what I may learn about his family and their station——'"

"No, no; I have not said that," burst in May.

"Not said, only implied it. Still, if it be what you desire me to entertain, I will have no concealments from you."

"I cannot buy your secret by a false pretence, Loo; there is no such compact as this between Layton and myself. Alfred asked me——"

"Alfred!" said Mrs. Morris, repeating the name after her, and with such a significance as sent all the colour to the girl's cheek and forehead—"Alfred! And what did Alfred ask you?"

"I scarcely know what I am saying," cried May, as she covered her face with her hands.

"Poor child!" cried Mrs. Morris, tenderly, "I can find my way into your heart without your breaking it. Do not

cry, dearest. I know as well all that he said as if I had overheard him saying it! The world has just its two kinds of suitors, the one who offers us marriage in a sort of grand princely fashion, and the other who, beseechingly proclaiming his utter unworthiness, asks us to wait—to wait for an uncle or a stepmother's death—to wait till he has got this place in the colonies, or that vicarage in Bleakshire—to wait till he has earned fame and honour, and Heaven knows what—till, in fact, he shall have won a wreath of laurel for his brows, and we have attained to a false plait for ours!" She paused a second or two to see if May would speak, but as she continued silent, Mrs. Morris went on: "There are few stock subjects people are more eloquent in condemning than what are called long engagements. There are some dozen of easy platitudes that every one has by heart on this theme; and yet, if the truth were to be told, it is the waiting is the best of it—the marriage is the mistake! That faint little flickering hope that lighted us on for years and years is extinguished at the church door, and never relighted after; so that, May, my advice to you is, never contract a long engagement until you have made up your mind not to marry at the end of it! My poor, poor child! why are you sobbing so bitterly? Surely I have said nothing to cause you sorrow?"

May turned away without speaking, but her heaving shoulders betrayed how intensely she was weeping.

"May *I* see him—may *I* speak with him, May?" said Mrs. Morris, drawing her arm affectionately around her waist.

"To what end—with what view?" said the girl, suddenly, and almost haughtily.

"Now that you ask me in that tone, May, I scarcely know. I suppose I meant to show him how inconsiderate, how impossible, his hopes were; that there was nothing in his station or prospects that could warrant this presumption. I suppose I had something of this sort on my mind, but, I own to you now, your haughty glance has completely routed all my wise resolutions."

"Perhaps you speculated on the influence of that peculiar knowledge of his family history you appear to be possessed of?" said May, with some pique.

"Perhaps so," was the dry rejoinder.

"And which you do not mean to confide to *me?*" said the girl, proudly.

"I have not said so. So long as you maintained that Mr. Layton was to you nothing beyond a mere acquaintance, my secret, as you have so grandly called it, might very well rest

in my own keeping. If, however, the time were come that he should occupy a very different place in your regard——"

"Instead of saying 'were come,' Loo, just say, 'If the time might come,'" said May, timidly.

"Well, then, 'if the time *might* come,' I *might* tell all that I know about him."

"But then it might be too late. I mean, that it might come when it could only grieve, and not guide me."

"Oh, if I thought *that*, you should never know it! Be assured of one thing, May: no one ever less warred against the inevitable than myself. When I read, 'No passage this way,' I never hesitate about seeking another road."

"And I mean to go mine, and without a guide either!" said May, moving towards the door.

"So I perceived some time back," was the dry reply of Mrs. Morris, as she busied herself with the papers before her.

"Good night, dear, and forgive my interruption," said May, opening the door.

"Good night, and delightful dreams to you," said Mrs. Morris, in her own most silvery accents. And May was gone.

The door had not well closed when Mrs. Morris was again, pen in hand, glancing rapidly over what she had written, to catch up the clue. This was quickly accomplished, and she wrote away rapidly. It is not "in our brief" to read that letter; nor would it be "evidence;" enough, then, that we say it was one of those light, sparkling little epistles which are thrown off in close confidence, and in which the writer fearlessly touches any theme that offers. She sketched off the Heathcotes with a few easy graphic touches, giving a very pleasing portraiture of May herself, ending with these words:—

"Add to all these attractions a large estate and a considerable sum in the funds, and then say, dear pa, is not this what Ludlow had so long been looking for? I am well aware of his pleasant habit of believing nothing, nor any one, so that you must begin by referring him to Doctors' Commons, where he can see the will. General Leslie died in 18—, and left Sir William Heathcote sole executor. When fully satisfied on the money question, you can learn anything further from me that you wish; one thing only I stipulate for, and that is, to hold no correspondence myself with L. Of course, like as in everything else, he'll not put any faith in this resolution; but time will teach him at last. The negotiation must be confided to your own hands. Do not employ Collier nor any one else. Be secret, and be speedy, for I plainly perceive the

young lady will marry some one immediately after learning a disappointment now impending. Remember, my own conditions are: all the letters, and that we meet as utter strangers. I ask nothing more, I will accept nothing less. As regards Clara, he cannot, I suspect, make any difficulty; but that may be a question for ulterior consideration. Clara is growing up pretty, but has lost all her spirits, and will, in a few months more, look every day of her real age. I am sadly vexed about this; but it comes into the long category of the things to be endured."

The letter wound up with some little light and flippant allusions to her father's complaints about political ingratitude:—

"I really do forget, dear papa, which are our friends; but surely no party would refuse your application for a moderate employment. The only creature I know personally amongst them is the Colonial Sec., and he says, 'They've left me nothing to give but the bishoprics.' Better that, perhaps, than nothing; but could you manage to accept one? *that* is the question. There is an Irish M.P. here—a certain O'Shea—who tells me there are a variety of things to give in the West Indies, with what he calls wonderful pickings—meaning, I suppose, stealings. Why not look for one of these? I'll question my friend the Member more closely, and give you the result.

"It was odd enough, a few months ago, O'S., never suspecting to whom he was talking, said, 'There was an old fellow in Ireland, a certain Nick Holmes, could tell more of Government rogueries and rascalities than any man living; and, if I were he, I'd make them give me the first good thing vacant, or I'd speak out.' Dear papa, having made so much out of silence, is it not worth while to think how much eloquence might be worth?

"Your affectionate daughter,

"Lucy M."

CHAPTER XVI.

A SICK ROOM.

It was a severe night of early winter—one of those stormy intervals in which Italy seems to assume all the rigours of some northern land, with an impetuosity derived from her own more excitable latitude. The rain beat against the windows with distinct and separate plashes, and the wind rattled and shook the strong walls with a violence that seemed irresistible.

In a large old room of a very old palace at Lucca, Alfred Layton walked to and fro, stopping every now and then to listen to some heightened effort of the gale without, and then resuming his lonely saunter. There were two large and richly ornamented fireplaces, and in one of them a small fire was burning, and close to this stood a table with a shaded lamp, and by these frail lights a little brightness was shed over this portion of the vast chamber, while the remainder was shrouded in deep shadow. As the fitful flashes of the wood fire shone from time to time on the walls, little glimpses might be caught of a much-faded tapestry, representing some scenes from the "Æneid;" but on none of these did Layton turn an eye nor bestow a thought, for he was deep in sorrowful reflections of his own—cares too heavy to admit of any passing distraction. He was alone, for Agincourt had gone to spend the day at the "Caprini," whither Alfred would have accompanied him but for a letter which the morning's post had brought to his hands, and whose contents had overwhelmed him with sorrow.

It was from his mother, written from a sick-bed, and in a hand that betokened the most extreme debility. And oh! what intense expression there is in these weak and wavering lines, wherein the letters seemed to vibrate still with the tremulous motion of the fevered fingers!—what a deep significance do we attach to every word thus written! till at length, possessed of every syllable and every stop, we conjure up the scene where all was written, and feel as though we heard the hurried breathing of the sick-room. She had put off writing week after week, but now could defer no longer.

It was upwards of two months since his father had left her to go to Dublin, and, from the day he went, she had never heard from him. A paragraph, however, in a morning paper, though not giving his name, unmistakably alluded to him as one who had grievously fallen from the high and honourable station he had once occupied, and spoke of the lamentable reverse that should show such a man in the dock of a police-court on the charge of insulting and libelling a public character in a ribald handbill. The prisoner was so hopelessly sunk in drunkenness, it added, that he was removed from the court, and the examination postponed.

By selling one by one the little articles of furniture she had, she contrived hitherto to eke out a wretched support, and it was only when at last these miserable resources had utterly failed her that she was driven to grieve her son with her sad story. Nor was the least touching part of her troubles that in which she spoke of her straits, to avoid being considered an object of charity by her neighbours. The very fact of the rector having overpaid for a few books he had purchased made her discontinue to send him others, so sensitive had misery made her. And yet, strangely enough, there did not exist the same repugnance to accept of little favours and trifling kindnesses from the poor people about her, of whom she spoke with a deep and affectionate gratitude. Her whole heart was, however, full of one thought and one hope—to see her dear son before she died. It was a last wish, and she felt as though indulging it had given her the energy which had prolonged her life. Doubts would cross her mind from time to time if it were possible for him to come—if he could be so far his own master as to be able to hasten to her—and even if doing so, he could be yet in time; but all these would give way before the strength of her hope.

"That I should see you beside my bed—that you should hold my hand as I go hence—will be happiness enough to requite me for much sorrow!" wrote she. "But if this may not be, and that we are to meet no more here, never forget that in my last prayer your name was mingled, and that when I entreated forgiveness for myself, I implored a blessing for *you!*"

"That letter was written on the Monday before; and where had he been on that same Monday evening?" asked he of himself. "How had he been occupied in those same hours when she was writing this? Yes, that evening he was seated beside May Leslie at the piano, while she played and

sang for him. They had been talking of German song-writers, and she was recalling here and there such snatches of Uhland and Schiller as she could remember; while Clara, leaning over the back of his chair, was muttering the words when May forgot them, and in an accent the purest and truest. What a happy hour was that to *him!* and to *her* how wretched—how inexpressibly wretched—as, alone and friendless, she wrote those faint lines!"

Poor Layton felt very bitterly the thought that, while he was living in an easy enjoyment of life, his mother, whom he loved dearly, should be in deep want and suffering.

In the easy carelessness of a disposition inherited from his father, he had latterly been spending money far too freely. His constant visits to Marlia required a horse, and then, with all a poor man's dread to be thought poor, he was ten times more liberal to servants than was called for, and even too ready to join in whatever involved cost or expense. Latterly, too, he had lost at play; small sums to be sure, but they were the small sums of a small exchequer, and they occurred every day, for, at the game of pool, poor Layton's ball was always the first on the retired list; and the terrible Mr. O'Shea, who observed a sort of reserve with Charles Heathcote, made no scruple of employing sharp practice with the tutor.

He emptied the contents of his purse on the table, and found that all his worldly wealth was a trifle over fifteen pounds, and of this he was indebted to Charles Heathcote some three or four—the losses of his last evening at the "Caprini." What was to be done? A journey to Ireland would cost fully the double of all he possessed, not to say that, once there, he would require means. So little was he given to habits of personal indulgence, that he had nothing—absolutely nothing—to dispose of save his watch, and that was of little value; a few books, indeed, he possessed, but their worth, even if he could obtain it, would have been of no service. With these embarrassing thoughts of his poverty came also others, scarcely less fraught with difficulty. How should he relieve himself of his charge of Lord Agincourt? There would be no time to write to his guardians and receive their reply. He could not leave the boy in Italy; nor dare he, without the consent of his relatives, take him back to England. How to meet these difficulties he knew not, and time was pressing—every hour of moment to him. Was there one, even one, whose counsel he could ask, or whose assistance he could bespeak? He ran over

the names of those around him, but against such, in turn, some insuperable objection presented itself. There possibly had been a time he might have had recourse to Sir William, frankly owning how he was circumstanced, and bespeaking his aid for the moment; but of late the old baronet's manner towards him had been more cold and reserved than at first—studiously courteous, it is true, but a courtesy that excluded intimacy. As to Charles, they had never been really friendly together, and yet there was a familiarity between them that made a better understanding more remote than ever.

While he revolved all these troubles in his head, he walked up and down his room with the feverish impatience of one to whom rest was torture. At last, even the house seemed too narrow for his restless spirit, and, taking his hat, he went out, careless of the swooping rain, nor mindful of the cold and cutting wind as it swept down from the last spur of the Apennines. As the chill rain drenched him, there seemed almost a sense of relief in the substitution of a bodily suffering to the fever that burned in his brain, and seeking out the bleakest part of the old ramparts, he stood breasting the storm, which had now increased to a perfect hurricane.

"The rain cannot beat upon one more friendless and forlorn," muttered he, as he stood shivering there; the strange fascination of misery suggesting a sort of bastard heroism to his spirit. "The humblest peasant in that dreary Campagna has more of sympathy and kindness than I have. He has those poor as himself and powerless to aid, but willing to befriend him." There was even in his days of depression a fierce revolt in his nature against the position he occupied in the world. The acceptance on sufferance, the recognition accorded to his pupil being his only claim to attention, were painful wounds to a haughty temperament, and with the ingenuity of a self-tormentor, he ascribed every reverse he met in life to his false position. He accepted it, no doubt, to be able to help those who had made such sacrifices for him, and yet even in this it was a failure. There lay his poor mother, dying of very want, in actual destitution, and he could not help—could not even be with her!

Though his wet clothes, now soaked with half-frozen drift, sent a deadly chill through him, the fever of his blood rendered him unconscious of it, and his burning brain seemed to defy the storm, while in the wild raging of the elements he caught up a sort of excitement that sustained him. For more than two hours he wandered about in that half-frenzied

state, and at length, benumbed and exhausted, he turned homeward. To his surprise, he perceived, as he drew near, that the windows were all alight, and a red glow of a large wood fire sent its mellow glare across the street; but greater was his astonishment on entering to see the tall figure of a man stretched at full length on three chairs before the fire, fast asleep, a carpet-bag and a travelling-cloak beside him.

Never was Layton less disposed to see a stranger and play the host to any one, and he shook the sleeper's shoulder in a fashion that speedily awoke him; who, starting up with a bound, cried out, "Well, Britisher, I must say this is a kinder droll way to welcome a friend."

"Oh, colonel, is it you?" said Layton. "Pray forgive my rudeness. But coming in as I did, without expecting any one, wet and somewhat tired——" He stopped and looked vacantly about him, as though not clearly remembering where he was.

Quackinboss had, however, been keenly examining him while he spoke, and marked in his wildly excited eyes and flushed cheeks the signs of some high excitement. "You ain't noways right; you're wet through and cold besides," said he, taking his hand in both his own. "Do you feel ill?"

"Yes; that is—I feel as if—I—had—lost my way," muttered he, with long pauses between the words.

"There's nothing like bed and a sound sleep for that," said the other, gently; while, taking Layton's arm, he led him quietly along towards the half-open door of his bedroom. Passively surrendering himself to the other's care, Alfred made no resistance to all he dictated, and, removing his dripping clothes, he got into bed.

"It is here the most pain is now," said he, placing his palm on his temple, "here, and inside my head."

"I wish I could talk to that servant of yours; he don't seem a very bright sort of creetur, but I could make him of use." With this muttered remark, Quackinboss walked back into the sitting-room, where Layton's man was now extinguishing the lights and the fire. "You have to keep that fire in, I say—fire—great fire—hot water. Understand me?"

"'Strissimo! si," said the Tuscan, bowing courteously.

"Well, then, do you fetch some lemons—lemons. You know lemons, don't you?"

A shrug was the unhappy reply.

"Lemong—lemong! You know *them?*"

"Limoni! oh si." And he made the sign of squeezing them; and then, hastening out of the room, he speedily reappeared with lemons and other necessaries to concoct a drink.

"That's it—bravo, that's it! Brew it right hot, my worthy fellow," said Quackinboss, with a gesture that implied the water was to be boiled immediately. He now returned to Layton, whom he found sitting up in the bed, talking rapidly to himself, but with all the distinctness of one perfectly collected.

"By Marseilles I could reach Paris on Tuesday night, and London on Wednesday. Isn't there a daily packet for Genoa?" asked he, as Quackinboss entered.

"Well, I guess there's more than's good of 'em," drawled out the other; "ill-found, ill-manned, dirty craft as ever I put foot in!"

"Yes, but they leave every day, don't they?" asked Layton, impatiently.

"I ain't posted up in their doin's, nor I don't want to, that's a fact. We went ashore with a calm sea and a full moon, coming up from Civita-Vecchia——"

Layton burst into a laugh at the strange pronunciation—a wild, unearthly sort of laugh that ended in a low, faint sigh, after which he lay back like one exhausted.

"I'm a-goin' to take a little blood from you, I am!" said Quackinboss, producing a lancet which, from its shape and size, seemed more conversant with horse than human practice.

"I'll not be bled! How am I to travel a journey of seven, eight, or ten days and nights, if I'm bled?" cried the sick man, angrily.

"I've got to bleed you, and I'll do it!" said Quackinboss, as, taking out his handkerchief, he tore a long strip, like a ribbon, from its border.

"Francesco—Francesco!" screamed out Layton, wildly, "take this man away; he has no right to be here. I'll not endure it. Leave me—go—leave me!" screamed he, angrily.

There was that peculiar something about the look of Quackinboss that assured Francesco it would be as well not to meddle with him; and, like all his countrymen, he was quick to read an expression and profit by his knowledge. Even to the sick man, too, did the influence extend, and the determinate, purpose-like tone of his manner enforced obedience without even an effort.

"I was mystery-man for three years among the Choctaws,"

said he, as he bound up Layton's arm, "and I'll yield to no one livin' how to treat a swamp fever, and that's exactly what you've got." While the blood trickled from the open vein he continued to talk on in the same strain. "I've seen a red man anoint hisself all over with oil, and set fire to it, and then another stood by with a great blanket to wrap him up afore he was more than singed, and it always succeeded in stoppin' the fever. It brought it out to the surface like. Howsomever, it's only an Indian's fixin', and I don't like it with a white man. How d'ye feel now—better?"

A muttering, dissatisfied sound, but half articulate, seemed to say, "No better."

"It ain't to be expected yet," said Quackinboss. "Lie down, and be quiet a bit."

Although the first effect of the bleeding seemed to calm the sufferer and arrest his fever, the symptoms of the malady came back in full force afterwards, and, ere day broke, he was raving wildly. At one moment he fancied he was at work in the laboratory with his father, and he ran over great calculations of mental arithmetic with a marvellous volubility; then he was back in his chambers at Trinity, but he could not find his books; they were gone—lost—no, not lost, he suddenly remembered that he had sold them—sold them to send a pittance to his poor sick mother. "It's a sad story, every part of it," whispered he in Quackinboss's ear, while he clutched him closely with his hands. "It was a great man was lost, mark you; and in a great shipwreck even the fragments of the wreck work sad destruction, and of course none will say a word for him. But remember, sir, I am his son, and will not hear a syllable against him, from you nor any other." From this he abruptly broke off to speak of O'Shea, and his late altercation with him. "I waited at home all the morning for him, and at last got a note to say that he had forgotten to tell me of an appointment he had made to ride out with Miss Leslie, but he'll be punctual to the hour to-morrow. So it's better as it is, colonel, for you'll be here, and can act as my friend—won't you? Your countrymen understand all these sort of things so well. And then, if I be called away suddenly to England, don't tell them," whispered he, mysteriously—"don't tell them at the villa whither I've gone: they know nothing of me nor of my family—never heard of my ruined father, nor my poor, sick, destitute mother, dying of actual want—think of that—while I was playing the man of fortune here, affecting every extravagance—yes, it was you yourself said so; I overheard you in the

garden, asking why, or how was it, with such ample means, I would become a tutor."

It was not alone that these words were uttered in a calm and collected tone, but they actually recalled to the American a remark he had once made about Layton. "Well," said he, as if some apology was called for, "it warn't any business of mine, but I was sorry to see it."

"But you didn't know—you couldn't know," cried the other, eagerly, "that I had no choice; my health was breaking. I had overworked my head; I couldn't go on. Have you ever tried what it is to read ten hours a day? Answer me that."

"No; but I've been afoot sixteen out of the twenty-four, for weeks together, on an Indian trail; and that's con-siderable worse, I take it."

"Who cares for mere fatigue of body?" said Layton, contemptuously.

"And who says it's mere fatigue of body?" rejoined the other, "when every sense a man has is strained and stretched to breakin', his ear to the earth, and his eyes rangin' over the swell of the prairies, till his brain aches with the strong effort; for, mark ye, Choctaws isn't Pawnees: they're on you with a swoop, just like a white squall in the summer time." There is no sayin' how far Quackinboss, notwithstanding all his boasted skill in physic, might have been tempted to talk on about a theme he loved so well, when he was suddenly admonished, by the expression of Layton's face, that the sick man was utterly unconscious of all around him. The countenance had assumed that peculiar stern and stolid gaze which is so markedly the characteristic of an affected brain.

"There," muttered Quackinboss to himself, "I've been a-talkin' all this time to a poor creetur as is ravin' mad—all I've been doin' is to make him worse."

CHAPTER XVII.

A MASTER AND MAN.

Who owns the smart tandem that trips along so flippantly over the slightly frosted road from the Bagni towards Lucca? What genius, cunning in horseflesh, put that spicy pair together, perfect matches as they are in all but colour, for the wheeler is a blood chestnut, and the leader a bright grey, with bone and substance enough for hunters? they have a sort of lithe and wiry action that reminds one of the Hungarian breed, and so, indeed, a certain jaunty carriage of the head, and half wild-looking expression of eye, bespeak them. The high dog-cart, however, is unmistakably English, as well as the harness, with its massive mountings and broad straps. What an air of mingled elegance and solidity pervades the entire! It is, as it were, all that such an equipage can pretend to compass—lightness, speed, and a dash of sporting significance, being its chief characteristics.

It is not necessary to present you to the portly gentleman who holds the ribbons, all encased as he is in box-coats and railway wrappers; you can still distinguish Mr. O'Shea, and as unmistakably recognize his man Joe beside him. The morning is sharp, clear, and frosty, but so perfectly still, that the blue smoke of Mr. O'Shea's cigar hangs floating in the air behind him, as the nimble nags spin along at something slightly above thirteen miles an hour. Joe, too, solaces himself with the bland weed, but in more primitive fashion, from a short "dudeen" of native origin: his hat is pressed down firmly over his brows, and his hands, even to the wrists, deeply encased in his pockets, for Joe, be it owned, is less amply supplied with woollen comforts than his master, and feels the morning sharp.

"Now, I call this a very neat turn-out; the sort of thing a man might not be ashamed to tool along through any town in Europe," said O'Shea.

"You might show it in Sackville Street!" said Joe, proudly.

"Sackville Street?" rejoined O'Shea, in an accent of con-

temptuous derision. "Is there any use, I wonder, in bringing you all over the world?"

"There is not," said the other, in his most dogged manner.

"If there was," continued O'Shea, "you'd know that Dublin had no place amongst the great cities of Europe—that nobody went there—none so much as spoke of it. I'd just as soon talk of Macroom in good society."

"And why wouldn't you talk of Macroom? What's the shame in it?" asked the inexorable Joe.

"There would be just the same shame as if I was to bring you along with me when I was asked out to dinner!"

"You might do worse," was the dry reply.

"I'm curious to hear how."

"Troth, you might; and easy, too," said Joe, sententiously.

These slight passages did not seem to invite conversation, and so, for above a mile or two, nothing was spoken on either side. At last Mr. O'Shea said,—

"I think that grey horse has picked up a stone; he goes tenderly near side."

"He does not; he goes as well as you do," was Joe's answer.

"You're as blind as a bat, or you'd see he goes lame," said O'Shea, drawing up.

"There, he's thrown it now; it was only a bit of a pebble," said Joe, as though the victory was still on his side.

"Upon my life, I wonder why I keep you at all," burst out O'Shea, angrily.

"So do I; and I wonder more why I stay."

"Does it ever occur to you to guess why?"

"No; never."

"It has nothing to say to being well fed, well lodged, well paid, and well cared for?"

"No; it has not," said Joe, gravely; "the bit I ate, I get how I can; these is my own clothes, and sorrow sixpence I seen o' your money since last Christmas."

"Get down—get down on the road this instant. You shall never sit another mile beside me."

"I will not get down. Why would I, in a strange counthry, and not a farthin' in my pocket!"

"Have a civil tongue, then, and don't provoke me to turn you adrift on the world."

"I don't want to provoke you."

"What beastly stuff is that you are smoking?" said O'Shea, as a whole cloud from Joe's pipe came wafted across him.

"'Tisn't bastely at all. I took it out of your own bag this morning."

"Not out of the antelope's skin?" asked O'Shea, eagerly.

"Yes; out of the hairy bag with the little hoofs on it."

A loud burst of laughter was O'Shea's reply, and, for several seconds, he could not control his mirth.

"Do you know what you're smoking? It's Russian camomile!"

"Maybe it is."

"I got it to make a bitter mixture."

"It's bitther, sure enough, but it has a notion of tobacco, too."

O'Shea again laughed out, and longer than before.

"It's just a chance that you weren't poisoned," said he, at last. "Here—here's a cigar for you, and a real Cuban, too, one that young Heathcote never fancied would grace your lips."

Joe accepted the boon without acknowledgment; indeed, he scrutinized the gift with an air of half-depreciation.

"You don't seem to think much of a cigar," said O'Shea, testily.

"When I can get no betther," said Joe, biting off the end.

O'Shea frowned and turned away. It was evident that he had some difficulty in controlling himself, but he succeeded, and was silent. The effort, however, could not be sustained very long, and at last he said, but in a slow and measured tone,—

"Shall I tell you a home-truth, Master Joe?"

"Yes, if you like."

"It is this, then: it is that same ungracious and ungrateful way with which you, and every one like you in Ireland, receive benefits, disgusts every stranger."

"Benefits!"

"Yes, benefits—I said benefits."

"Sure, what's our own isn't benefits," rejoined Joe, calmly.

"Your own? May I ask if the contents of that bag were your own?"

"'Tis at the devil I'm wishin' it now," said Joe, putting his hand on his stomach. "'Tis tearing me to pieces, it is, bad luck to it!"

O'Shea was angry, but such was the rueful expression of Joe's face that he laughed out again.

"Now he's goin' lame, if you like!" cried Joe, with a tone of triumph that said, "All the mishaps are not on *my* side."

O'Shea pulled up, and knowing, probably, the utter in-

utility of employing Joe at such a moment got down himself to see what was amiss.

"No, it's the off leg," cried Joe, as his master was carefully examining the near one.

"I suppose he must have touched the frog on a sharp stone," said O'Shea, after a long and fruitless exploration.

"I don't think so," said Joe; "'tis more like to be a dizaze of the bone—one of thim dizazes of the fetlock that's never cured."

A deeply uttered malediction was O'Shea's answer to the pleasant prediction.

"I never see one of them recover," resumed Joe, who saw his advantage; "but the baste will do many a day's slow work—in a cart."

"Hold your prate, and be hanged to you!" muttered O'Shea, as, between anger and stooping, he was threatened with a small apoplexy. "Move them on gently for a few yards, till I get a look at him."

Joe leisurely moved into his master's place, and bestowed the rug very comfortably around his legs. This done, with a degree of detail and delay that seemed almost intended to irritate, he next slowly arranged the reins in his fingers, and then, with a jerk of his whip-hand, sending out the lash in a variety of curves, he brought the whipcord down on the leader with a "nip" that made him plunge, while the wheeler, understanding the hint, started off at full swing. So sudden and unexpected was the start, that O'Shea had barely time to spring out of the way to escape the wheel. Before, indeed, he had thoroughly recovered his footing, Joe had swept past a short turning of the road, leaving nothing but a light train of dust to mark his course.

"Stop! pull up! stop! confound you!" cried O'Shea, with other little expletives that print is not called on to repeat, and then, boiling with passion, he set off in pursuit. When he had gained the angle of the road, it was only to catch one look at his equipage as it disappeared in the distance: the road, dipping suddenly, showed him little more than a torso of the "faithful Joe," diminishing rapidly to a head, and then vanishing entirely.

"What a scoundrel! what a rascal!" cried O'Shea, as he wiped his forehead; and then, with his fist clenched and upraised, "registered a vow," as Mr. O'Connell used to say, of unlimited vengeance. If this true history does not record the full measure of the heart-devouring anger of O'Shea, it is not from any sense of its being undeserved or unreason-

able, for, after all, worthy reader, it might have pushed even *your* patience to have been left standing, of a sharp November morning, on a lonely road, while your carriage was driven off by an insolent "flunkey."

As he was about midway between the Bagni and the town of Lucca, to which he was bound, he half hesitated whether to go on or to return. There was shame in either course. Shame in going back to recount his misadventure; shame in having to call Joe to a reckoning in Lucca before a crowd of strangers, and that vile population of the stable-yard, with which, doubtless, Joe would have achieved popularity before his master could arrive.

Of a verity the situation was embarrassing, and in his muttered comments upon it might be read how thoroughly his mind took in every phase of its difficulty. "How they'll laugh at me up at the Villa. It will last Sir William for the winter; he'll soon hear how I won the trap from his son, and he'll be ready with the old saw, 'Ah! ill got, ill gone!' How young Heathcote will enjoy it; and the widow—if she be a widow—won't she caricature me, as I stand halloaing out after the runaway rascal? Very hard to get out of all this ridicule without something serious to cover it. That's the only way to get out of a laughable adventure; so, Master Layton, it's all the worse for *you* this morning." In this train of thought was he deeply immersed as a peasant drove past in his light "calesina." O'Shea quickly hailed the man, and bargained with him for a seat to Lucca.

Six weary miles of a jolting vehicle did not contribute much to restore his calm of mind, and it was in a perfect frenzy of anger he walked into the inn-yard, where he saw his carriage now standing. In the stables his horses stood, sheeted up, but still dirty and travel-stained. Joe was absent. "He had been there five minutes ago—he was not an instant gone—he had never left his horses till now—taken such care of them—watered, fed, groomed, and clothed them—he was a treasure—there was not his like to be found." These, and such-like, were the eulogies universally bestowed by the stable constituency upon one whom O'Shea was at the same time consigning in every form to the infernal gods! The grooms and helpers wore a half grin on their faces as he passed out, and again he muttered, "All the worse for *you*, Layton; *you*'ll have to pay the reckoning."

He was not long in finding the Barsotti Palace, where Layton lodged; an old tumble-down place it was, with a grass-grown, mildewed court, and some fractured statues,

green with damp, around it. The porter, indicating with a gesture of his thumb where the stranger lived, left O Shea to plod up the stairs alone.

It was strange enough that it should then have occurred to him, for the first time, that he had no definite idea about what he was coming. Layton and he had, it is true, some words, and Layton had given him time and place to continue the theme; but in what way? To make Layton reiterate in cold blood something he might have uttered in anger, and would probably retract, if called upon courteously: this would be very poor policy. While, on the other hand, to permit him to insinuate anything on the score of his success at play might be even worse again. It was a case for very nice management, and so O'Shea thought, as, after arriving at a door bearing Layton's name on a visiting-card, he took a turn in the lobby to consider his course of proceeding. The more he thought over it, the more difficult he found it; in fact, at last he saw it to be one of those cases in which the eventuality alone can decide the line to take, and so he gave a vigorous pull at the bell, determined to begin the campaign at once.

The door was not opened immediately, and he repeated his summons still louder. Scarcely had the rope quitted his hand, however, when a heavy bolt was drawn back, the door was thrown wide, and a tall athletic man, in shirt and trousers, stood before him.

"Well, stranger, you arn't much distressed with patience, that's a fact," said a strongly nasal accent, while the speaker gave a look of very fierce defiance at the visitor.

"Am I speaking to Colonel Quackinboss?" asked O'Shea, in some surprise.

"Well, sir, if it ain't him, it's some one in *his* skin, I'm thinkin'."

"My visit was to Mr. Layton," said the other, stiffly. "Is he at home?"

"Yes, sir; but he's not a goin' to see you."

"I came here by his appointment."

"That don't change matters a red cent, stranger; and as I said a'ready, he ain't a goin' to see you."

"Oh, then I'm to understand that he has placed himself in *your* hands? You assume to act for him?" said O'Shea, stiffly.

"Well, if you like to take it from that platform I'll offer no objection," said Quackinboss, gravely.

"Am I, or am I not, to regard you as a friend on this occasion?" said O'Shea, authoritatively.

"I'll tell you a secret, stranger; you'll not be your own friend if you don't speak to me in another tone of voice. I ain't used to be halloaed at, I ain't."

"One thing at a time, sir," said O'Shea. "When I have finished the business which brought me here, I shall be perfectly at your service."

"Now I call that talkin' reasonable. Step inside, sir, and take a seat," said Quackinboss, whose manner was now as calm as possible.

Whatever irritation O'Shea really felt, he contrived to subdue it in appearance, as he followed the other into the room.

O'Shea was not so deficient in tact that he could not see his best mode of dealing with the American was to proceed with every courtesy and deference, and so, as he seated himself opposite him, he mentioned the reason of his coming there without anything like temper, and stated that from a slight altercation such a difference arose as required either an explanation or a meeting.

"He can't go a shooting with you, stranger; he's struck down this morning," said Quackinboss, gravely, as the other finished.

"Do you mean he's ill?"

"I s'pose I do, when I said he was down, sir."

"This is most unfortunate," broke in O'Shea. "My duties as a public man require my being in England next week. I hoped to have settled this little matter before my departure. I see nothing for it but to beg your will in writing—a few lines will suffice—corroborate the fact of my having presented myself here, according to appointment, and mention the sad circumstances by which our intentions, for I believe I may speak of Mr. Layton's as my own, have been frustrated."

"Well now, stranger, we are speakin' in confidence here, and I may just as well observe to you, that of all the weapons that fit a man's hands, the pen is the one I'm least ready with. I'm indifferent good with firearms, or a bowie, but a pen, you see, cuts the fingers that hold it, just as often as it hurts the enemy, and I don't like it."

"But surely, where the object is merely to testify to a plain matter-of-fact——"

"There ain't no such things on the 'arth as plain matters of fact, sir," broke in Quackinboss, eagerly. "I've come to the middle period of life, and I never met one of 'em!"

O'Shea made a slight, very slight, movement of impatience at these words, but the other remarked it, and said,—

"We'll come to that presently, sir. Let us just post up this account of Mr. Layton's, first of all."

"I don't think there is anything further to detain me here," said O'Shea, rising with an air of stiff politeness.

"Won't you take something, sir—won't you liquor?" asked Quackinboss, calmly.

"Excuse me; I never do of a morning."

"I'm sorry for it. I was a thinkin', maybe, you'd warm up a bit with a glass of something strong. I was hopin' it's the cold of the day chilled you!"

"Do you mean this for insult, sir?" said O'Shea. "I ask you, because, really, your use of the English language is of a kind to warrant the question."

"That's where I wanted to see you, sir. You're coming up to a good boilin' point now, stranger," said Quackinboss, with a pleased look.

"Is he mad—is he deranged?" muttered O'Shea, half aloud.

"No, sir. We Western men are little liable to insanity; our lives are too much abroad and open-air lives for that. It's your thoughtful, reflective, deep men, as wears a rut in their mind with thinkin', them's the fellows goes mad."

O'Shea's stare of astonishment at this speech scarcely seemed to convey a concurrence in the assertion, and he made a step towards the door.

"If you're a goin', I've nothing more to say, sir," said Quackinboss.

"I cannot see what there is to detain me here!" said the other, sternly.

"There ain't much, that's a fact," was the cool reply. "There's nothing remarkable in them bottles; it's new brandy and British gin; and, as for myself, sir, I can only say I must give you a bill payable at sight—whenever we may meet again, I mean—for just now this young man here can't spare me. I'm his nurse, you see. I hope you understand me?"

"I believe I do."

"Well, that's all right, stranger, and here's my hand on't." And even before O'Shea was well aware, the other had taken his hand in his strong grasp and was shaking it heartily. O'Shea found it very hard not to laugh outright, but there was a meaning-like determination in the American's manner that showed it was no moment for mirth. It was, however, necessary to say something to relieve a very awkward pause, and so he observed,—

"I hope Mr. Layton's illness is not a serious one, I saw him, as I thought, perfectly well two days back."

"He's main bad, sir—very sick—very sick indeed."

"You have a doctor, I suppose?"

"No, sir. I have some experience myself, and I'm just a treatin' him by what I picked up among people that have very few apothecaries—the Mandan Indians."

"Without being particular, I must own I'd prefer a more civilized course of physic," said O'Shea, with a faint smile.

"Very likely, stranger; and if you had a dispute, you'd rather, mayhap, throw it into a law court, and leave it to three noisy fellows to quarrel over; while *I*'d look out for two plain fellows, with horny hands and honest hearts, and say, 'What's the rights o' this, gentlemen?'"

"I wish you every success, I'm sure," said O'Shea, bowing.

"The same to you, sir," said the other, in a sing-song tone. "Good-bye."

When O'Shea had reached the first landing, he stopped, and leaning against the wall, laughed heartily. "I hope I'll be able to remember all he said," muttered he, as he fancied himself amusing some choice company by a personation of the Yankee. "The whole thing was as good as a play! But," added he, after a pause, "I'm not sorry it's over, and that I have done with him!" Very true and heartfelt was this last reflection of the Member for Inch—a far more honest recognition than even the hearty laugh he had just enjoyed—and then there came an uneasy after-thought, that asked, "What could he mean by talking of a long bill, payable at some future opportunity? Surely he can't imagine that we're to renew all this if we ever meet again. No, no, Colonel, your manners and your medicine may be learned amongst the Mandans, but they won't do here with us!" And so he issued into the street, not quite reassured, but somewhat more comforted.

So occupied was his mind with the late scene, that he had walked fully half-way back to his inn ere he bestowed a thought upon Joe. Wise men were they who suggested that the sentence of a prisoner should not immediately follow the conclusion of his trial, but ensue after the interval of some two or three days. In the impulse of a mind fully charged with a long narrative of guilt there is a force that seeks its expansion in severity; whereas in the brief respite of even some hours, there come doubts, and hesitations, and regrets,

and palliations. In a word, a variety of considerations unadmitted before find entrance now to the mind, and are suffered to influence it.

Now, though Mr. O'Shea's first and not very unnatural impulse was to give Joe a sound thrashing and then discharge him, the interval we have just described moderated considerably the severity of this resolve. In the first place, although the reader may be astonished at the assertion, Joe was one very difficult to replace, since, independently of his aptitude to serve as groom, valet, or cook, he was deeply versed in all the personal belongings of his master. He had been with him through long years of difficulty, and aided him in various ways, from corrupting the virtuous freeholders of Inchabogue to raise an occasional supply on the rose-amethyst ring. Joe had fought for him and lied for him, with a zealous devotion not to be forgotten. Not, indeed, that he loved his master more, but that he liked the world less, and Joe found a sincere amount of pleasure in seeing how triumphantly their miserable pretensions swayed and dominated over mankind. And, lastly, he had another attribute, not to be undervalued in an age like ours—he had no wages! It is not to be understood that he served O'Shea out of some sense of heroic devotion or attachment: no; Joe lived, as they say in India, on "loot." When times were prosperous—that is, when billiards and blind-hookey smiled, and to his master's pockets came home small Californias of half-crowns and even sovereigns, Joe prospered also. He drank boldly and freely from the cup when brimful, but the half-empty goblet he only sipped at: when seasons of pressure set in, Joe's existence was maintained by some inscrutable secret of his own; for, be it known that on O'Shea's arrival at an hotel, his almost first care was to announce, "You will observe my servant is on board wages; he pays for himself;" and Joe would corroborate the myth with a bow. Bethink yourself, good reader, had you been the Member for Inch, it might have been a question whether to separate from such a follower.

By the fluctuations of O'Shea's fortunes, Joe's whole conduct seemed moulded: when the world went well with his master, his manner grew somewhat almost respectful; let the times grow worse Joe became indifferent; a shade lower, and he was familiar and insolent; and, by long habit, O'Shea had come to recognize these changes as part of the condition of a varying fortune.

Little wonder was it that Joe grew to speak of his master and himself as one, complaining, as he would, "We never got

sixpence out of our property. 'Tis the ruin of us paying that annuity to our mother;" and so on.

Now these considerations, and many others like them, weighed deeply on O'Shea's mind, as he entered the room of the hotel, angry and irritated, doubtless, but far from decided as to how he should manifest it. Indeed, the deliberation was cut short, for there stood Joe before him.

"I thought I was never to see your face again," said O'Shea, scowling at him. "How dare you have the insolence to appear before me?"

"Isn't it well for you that I'm alive? Ain't you lucky that you're not answering for my death this minute?" said the other, boldly. "And if I didn't drive like blazes, would I be here now? Appear before you, indeed! I'd like to know who you'd be appearin' before, if I was murthered with them bitthers you gave me?"

"Lying scoundrel! you think to turn it all off in this manner. You commit a theft first, and if the offence had killed you, it's no more than you deserved. Who told you to steal the contents of that bag, sir?"

"The devil, I suppose, for I never felt pain like it—twistin', and tearin', and torturin' me, as if you had a pinchers in my inside, and were nippin' me to pieces!"

"I'm glad of it—heartily glad of it."

"I know you are—I know you well. 'Tis a corpse you'd like to see me this minute."

"So that I never set eyes on you, I don't care what becomes of you."

"That's enough—enough said. I'm goin'."

"Go, and be——!"

"No I won't. I'll go and earn my livin'; and I'll have my carakter, too— eleven years last Lady-day; and I'll be paid back to my own counthry; and I'll have my wages up to Saturday next; and the docther's bill, here, for all the stuff I tuk since I came in; and when you are ready with all this, you can ring for me." And with his hands clasped over his stomach, and in a half-bent position, Joe shuffled out and left his master to his own reflections.

The world is full of its strange vicissitudes, and in nothing more remarkably than the way people are reconciled, ignore the past, and start afresh in life to incur more disagreements, and set to bickering again. Great kings and kaisers indulge in this pastime; profound statesmen and politicians do very little else: what wonder, then, if the declining sun saw the smart tandem slipping along towards the Bagni, with the

O'Shea and his man sitting side by side in pleasant converse! They were both smoking, and seemed like men who enjoyed their picturesque drive, and the inspiriting pace they travelled at.

"When I'll singe these 'cat hairs' off, and trim him a little about the head, he'll look twice as well," said Joe, with his eye on the leader. "It's a pity to see a collar on him."

"We'll take him down to Rome, and show him off over the hurdles," said his master, joyfully.

"I was just thinkin' of that this minute; wasn't that strange now?"

"We'll have to go, for they're going to break up house here, and go off to Rome for the winter."

"How will we settle with Pan?" said Joe, thoughtfully.

"A bill, I suppose."

Joe shook his head doubtingly. "I'm afraid not."

"Go I will, and go I must," said O'Shea, resolutely. "I'm not going to lose the best chance I ever had in life for the sake of a beggarly innkeeper."

"Why would you? Sure, no one would ask you! For, after all, 'tis only drivin' away, if we're put to it. I don't think he'd overtake us."

"Not if we went the same pace you did this morning, Joe," said O'Shea, laughing; and Joe joined pleasantly in the laugh, and the event ceased to be a grievance from that instant.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. MORRIS AS COUNSELLOR.

The breakfast at the Villa Caprini always seemed to recall more of English daily life and habit than any other event of the day. It was not only in the luxuriously spread table, and the sideboard arrayed with that picturesque profusion so redolent of home, but there was that gay and hearty familiarity so eminently the temper of the hour, and that pleasant interchange of news and gossip, as each tore the envelope of his letter, or caught some amusing paragraph in his paper.

Mrs. Penthony Morris had a very wide correspondence, and usually contributed little scraps of intelligence from various parts of the Continent. They were generally the doings and sayings of that cognate world whose names require no introduction, and even those to whom they are unfamiliar would rather hear in silence than own to the ignorance. The derelicts of fashion are the staple of small-talk; they are suggestive of all the little social smartness one hears, and of that very Brummagem morality which assumes to judge them. In these Mrs. Morris revelled. No paragraph of the *Morning Post* was too mysteriously worded for her powers of interpretation; no asterisks could veil a name from her piercing gaze. Besides, she had fashioned a sort of algebraic code of life which wonderfully assisted her divination, and being given an unhappy marriage, she could foretell the separation, or, with the data of a certain old gentleman's visits to St. John's Wood, could predict his will with an accuracy that seemed marvellous. As she sat, surrounded with letters and notes of all sizes, she varied the tone of her intelligence so artfully as to canvass the suffrage of every listener. Now it was some piece of court gossip, some "scandal of Queen Elizabeth," now a curious political intrigue, and now, again, some dashing exploit of a young soldier in India. But whether it told of good or evil fortune, of some deeply interesting event or some passing triviality, her power of narrating it was considerable, as, with a tact all her own, she selected some one especial individual as chief listener. After a number of

short notices of London, Rome, and Paris, she tossed over several letters carelessly, saying,—

"I believe I have given you the cream of my correspondence. Stay, here is something about your old sloop the *Mosquito*, Lord Agincourt; would you like to hear of how she attacked the forts at the mouth of the—oh, how shall I attack it?—the Bhageebhahoo? This is a midshipman's letter, written the same evening of the action."

Though the question was addressed very pointedly, the boy never heard it, but sat deeply engaged in deciphering a very jagged handwriting in a letter before him. It was one of those scratchy, unfinished specimens of penmanship which are amongst the luxuries persons of condition occasionally indulge in. Seeing his preoccupation, Mrs. Morris did not repeat her question, but suffered him to pursue his researches undisturbed. He had just begun his breakfast when the letter arrived, and now he ceased to eat anything, but seemed entirely engrossed by his news. At last he arose abruptly, and left the room.

"I hope Agincourt has not got any bad tidings," said Sir William; "he seems agitated and uneasy."

"I saw his guardian's name — Sommerville — on the envelope," said Mrs. Morris. "It is, probably, one of those pleasant epistles which wards receive quarterly to remind them that even minors have miseries."

The meal did not recover its pleasant tone after this little incident, and soon after they all scattered through the house and the grounds, Mrs. Morris setting out for her usual woodland walk, which she took each morning. A half-glance the boy had given her as he quitted the room at breakfast-time, induced her to believe that he wanted to consult her about his letter, and so, as she entered the shrubbery, she was not surprised to find Lord Agincourt there before her.

"I was just wishing it might be your footstep I heard on the gravel," said he, joining her. "May I keep you company?"

"To be sure, provided you don't make love to me, which I never permit in the forenoon."

"Oh, I have other thoughts in my head," said he, sighing drearily; "and you are the very one to advise me what to do. Not, indeed, that I have any choice about that, only how to do it, that's the question."

"When one has the road marked out, it's never very hard to decide on the mode of the journey," said she. "Tell me what your troubles are."

"Troubles you may well call them," said he, with a deeper

sigh. "There, read that—if you can read it—for the old Earl does not grow more legible by being older."

"'Crews Court,'" read she, aloud. "Handsome old abbey it must be," added she, remarking on a little tinted sketch at the top of the letter.

"Yes, that's a place of mine. I was born there," said the boy, half proudly.

"It's quite princely."

"It's a fine old thing, and I'd give it all this minute not to have had that disagreeable letter."

"'My dear Henry,'" began she, in a low, muttering voice, "'I have heard with—with'—not abomination—oh no, 'astonishment—with astonishment, not unmixed with'—it can't be straw—is it straw?—no, it is 'shame,—not unmixed with shame, that you have so far forgiven—forgotten'—oh, that's it—'what was done to yourself.'"

"No, 'what was due to yourself,'" interrupted he "that's a favourite word of his, and so I know it."

"'To become the—the'—dear me, what can this be with the vigorous G at the beginning?—'to become'—is it really the Giant?—'to become the Giant'——"

The boy here burst into a fit of laughing, and taking the letter from her, proceeded to read it out.

"I have spelt it all over five times," said he, "and I know it by heart. 'I have heard with astonishment, not unmixed with shame, that you have so far forgotten what was due to yourself as to become the Guest of one who for so many years was the political opponent and ever personal enemy of our house. Your ignorance of family history cannot possibly be such as that you are unaware of the claims once put forward by this same Sir William Heathcote to your father's peerage, or of the disgraceful law proceedings instituted to establish his pretensions.' As if I ever heard a word of all this before! as if I knew or cared a brass button about the matter!" burst he in. "'Had your tutor'—here comes in my poor coach for *his* turn," said Agincourt—"'had your tutor but bestowed proper attention to the instructions written by my own hand for his guidance——' We never could read them; we have been at them for hours together, and all we could make out was, 'Let him study hazard, roulette, and all other such games;' which rather surprised us, till we found out it was 'shun,' and not 'study,' and 'only frequent the fast society of each city he visits,' which was a mistake for 'first.'"

"Certainly the noble Lord has a most ambiguous caligra-

phy," said she, smiling; "and Mr. Layton is not so culpable as might be imagined."

"Ah!" cried the boy, laughing, "I wish you had seen Alfred's face on the day he received our first quarter's remittance, and read out: 'You may drag on me like a mouse, if you please,' which was intended to be, 'draw upon me to a like amount, if you please;' and it was three weeks before we could make that out! But let me go on—where was I? Oh, at 'guidance.' 'Recent information has, however, shown me that nothing could have been more unfortunate than our choice of this young man, his father being one of the most dangerous individuals known to the police, a man familiar with the lowest haunts of crime, a notorious swindler, and a libeller by profession. In the letter which I send off by this day's post to your tutor I have enclosed one from his father to myself. It is not very likely that he will show it to you, as it contains the most insolent demands for an increase of salary—"as some slight, though inadequate, compensation for an office unbecoming my son's rank, insulting to his abilities, and even damaging to his acquirements." I give you this in his own choice language, but there is much more in the same strain. The man, it would appear, has just come out of a lunatic asylum, to which place his intemperate habits had brought him; and I may mention, that his first act of gratitude to the benevolent individual who had undertaken the whole cost of his maintenance there was to assault him in the open street, and give him a most savage beating. Captain Hone or Holmes—a distinguished officer, as I am told—is still confined to his room from the consequences.'"

"How very dreadful!" said Mrs. Morris, calmly. "Shocking treatment! for a distinguished officer, too!"

"Dreadful fellow he must be," said the boy. "What a rare fright he must have given my old guardian! But the end of it all is, I'm to leave Alfred, and go back to England at once. I wish I was going to sea again; I wish I was off thousands of miles away, and not to come home for years. To part with the kind, good fellow, that was like a brother to me, this way—how can I do it? And do you perceive, he hasn't one word to say against Alfred? It's only that he has the misfortune of this terrible father. And, after all, might not that be any one's lot? You might have a father you couldn't help being ashamed of."

"Of course," said she; "I can fancy such a case easily enough."

"I know it will nearly kill poor Alfred; he'll not be able

to bear it. He's as proud as he is clever, and he'll not endure the tone of the Earl's letter. Who knows what he'll do? Can *you* guess?"

"Not in the least. I imagine that he'll submit as patiently as he can, and look out for another situation."

"Ah, there you don't know him!" broke in the boy; "he can't endure this kind of thing. He only consented to take *me* because his health was breaking up from hard reading; he wanted rest and a change of climate. At first he refused altogether, and only gave way when some of his college dons over-persuaded him."

She smiled a half-assent, but said nothing.

"Then there's another point," said he, suddenly: "I'm sure his Lordship has not been very measured in the terms of his letter to him. I can just fancy the tone of it; and I don't know how poor Alfred is to bear that."

"My dear boy, you'll learn one of these days—and the knowledge will come not the less soon from your being a Peer—that all the world is either forbearing or overbearing. You must be wolf or lamb; there's no help for it."

"Alfred never told me so," said he, sternly.

"It's more than likely that he did not know! There are no men know less of life that these college creatures; and there lies the great mistake in selecting such men for tutors for our present-day life and its accidents. Alexandre Dumas would be a safer guide than Herodotus; and Thackeray teach you much more than Socrates."

"If I only had in my head one-half of what Alfred knew, I'd be well satisfied," said the boy. "Ay, and what's better still, without his thinking a bit about it."

"And so," said she, musingly, "you are to go back to England?"

"That does not seem quite settled, for he says, in a post-script, that Sir George Rivers, one of the Cabinet, I believe, has mentioned some gentleman, a 'member of their party,' now in Italy, and who would probably consent to take charge of me till some further arrangements could be come to."

"Hold your chain till a new bear-leader turned up!" said she, laughing. "Oh dear! I wonder when that wise generation of guardians will come to know that the real guide for the creatures like you is a woman. Yes, you ought to be travelling with your governess—some one, whose ladylike tone and good manners would insensibly instil quietness, reserve, and reverence in your breeding, correct your bad

French, and teach you to enter or leave a room without seeming to be a housebreaker!"

"I should like to know who does that?" asked he, indignantly.

"Every one of you young Englishmen, whether you come fresh from Brasenose or the Mess of the Forty-something, you have all of you the same air of bashful bull-dogs!"

"Oh, come, this is too bad; is this the style of Charles Heathcote, for instance?"

"Most essentially it is; the only thing is that, the bull-dog element predominating in his nature, he appears the less awkward in consequence."

"I should like to hear what you'd say of the O'Shea."

"Oh, Mr. O'Shea is an Irishman, and *their* ways bear the same relation to general good breeding that rope-dancing does to waltzing."

"I'll take good care not to ask you for any description of myself," said he, laughingly.

"You are very wrong then, for you should have heard something excessively flattering," was her reply. "Shall I tell you who your new protector is to be?" cried she, after a moment's pause; "I have just guessed it: the O'Shea himself!"

"O'Shea! impossible; how could you imagine such a thing?"

"I'm certain I'm right. He is always talking of his friend Sir George Rivers—he calls him Rivers—who is Colonial Secretary, and who is to make him either Bishop of Barbadoes or a Gold Stick at the Gambia; and you'll see if I'm not correct, and that the wardship of a young scapegrace lordling is to be the retaining fee of this faithful follower of his party. Of course, there will be no question of tutorship; in fact, it would have such an unpleasant resemblance to the farce and Mr. O'Toole, as to be impossible. You will simply be travelling together. It will be double harness, but only one horse doing the work!"

"I never can make out whether you're in jest or in earnest," said he, pettishly.

"I'm always in earnest when I'm jesting; that's the only clue I can give you."

"But all this time we have been wandering away from the only thing I wanted to think of—how to part with dear Alfred. You have told me nothing about that."

"These are things which, as the French say, always do themselves, and, consequently, it is better never to plan or

provide for; and, remember, as a maxim, whenever the current is carrying you the way you want to go, put in your oar as little as possible. And as to old associations, they are like old boots: they are very pleasant wear, but they won't last for ever. There, now, I have given you quite enough matter to think over: and so, good-bye."

As Agincourt turned his steps slowly towards the house, he marvelled with himself what amount of guidance she had given him.

CHAPTER XIX.

JOE'S DIPLOMACY.

MR. O'SHEA'S man was not one to put his light under a bushel; so, when he received at the Post-office a very portentous-looking letter, heavily sealed, and marked "On Her Majesty's Service," he duly stopped the two or three English loungers he saw about to show them the document, on pretence of asking if any demand for postage could be made; if it had not been wrongfully detained; if they thought it had been opened and read; and so on,—all these inquiries having for their object to inform the general public that the Member for Inch was in close relation and correspondence with Downing Street.

In sooth, the letter had as significant an external as any gentleman in pursuit of a place might have desired. In colour, texture, and fashion there was nothing wanting to to its authenticity, and it might, without any disparagement its outside, have named Mr. O'Shea a Governor of the Bahamas, or a Mahogany Commissioner at Ruatan. It was, in fact, a document that, left negligently in the way, might have made a dun appeasable, and a creditor patient. There were few men it might not in some degree have imposed on, but of that few the O'Shea himself was one. He knew well —too well—that it foretold neither place nor employment; that it was the shell of a very small kernel; nothing more, in short, than a note from an old friend and schoolfellow,

then acting as the Private Secretary of a Cabinet Minister—one who, indeed, kept his friend O'Shea fully informed as to everything that fell vacant, but, unhappily, accompanied the intelligence with a catalogue of the applicants, usually something like the list of the Smiths in a Directory.

So little impatient was O'Shea for the contents, that he had half eaten his breakfast and looked through *Punch* before he broke the seal. The enclosure was from the hand of his friend Tom Radwell, but whose peculiar drollery it was to correspond in the form of a mock despatch. The note, therefore, though merely containing gossip, was written with all attention to margin and caligraphy, and even in places affected the solemn style of the Office. It was headed "Secret and Confidential," and opened thus:—

"Sir,—By your despatch of the 18th ult., containing four enclosures—three protested bills, and your stepmother's I O for 18*l.* 5*s.*—I am induced to believe that no material change has occurred in the situation of your affairs—a circumstance the more to be deplored, inasmuch as her Majesty's Government cannot at this moment, with that due regard imposed on them for the public service, undertake either to reconsider your claims, or by an extraordinary exercise of the powers vested in them by the Act of Teddy the Tiler, chap. 4, secs. 9 and 10, appoint you in the way and manner you propose. So much, my dear Gorman, old Rivers declared to me this morning, confidentially adding, I wish that Irish party would understand that, when we could buy them altogether in a basket, as in O'Connell's day, the arrangement was satisfactory; but to have to purchase them separately—each potato by himself—is a terrible loss of time, and leads to no end of higgling. Why can't you agree amongst yourselves—make your bargain, and then divide the spoils quietly? It is the way your forefathers understood the law of commonage, and nobody ever grumbled that his neighbour had a cow or a pig too many! The English of all this is, they don't want you just now, and they won't have you, for you're an article that never kept well, and even when bonded, your loss by leakage is considerable.

"Every Irishman I ever met makes the same mistake of offering himself for sale when the commodity is not wanted. If you see muffs and boas in Regent Street in July, ain't they always ticketed 'a great sacrifice'? Can't you read the lesson? But so it is with you. You fancy you'll induce people to travel a bad road by putting up a turnpike.

"I'm sorry to say all this to you, but I see plainly politics will not do any longer as a pursuit. It is not only that all appointments are so scrutinized now-a-days, but that every man's name in a division is weighed and considered in a fashion that renders a mere majority of less moment than the fact of how it was composed. If I cannot manage something for you in the West Indies, you must try Cheltenham.

"Rivers has just sent for me.

"'What of your friend O'Shea? Didn't you tell me he was in the north of Italy?'

"'Yes,' said I; 'he's getting up the Italian question. He has accumulated a mass of facts which will astonish the House next session.'

"'Confound his facts!' muttered he. 'Here has been Lord Sommerville with me, about some young ward of his. I don't well understand what he wants, or what he wishes me to do; but the drift is, to find some one—a gentleman, of course—who would take charge of the boy for a short time; he is a marquis, with large expectations, and one day or other will be a man of mark.'

"I tried the dignity tone, but old Rivers interrupted me quickly:—

"'Yes, yes, of course. Mere companionship, nothing more. Sound O'Shea upon it, and let me hear.'

"Here, then, my dear Gorman, is the 'opening' you so long have looked for; and if *you* cannot turn such a position to good profit, *who* can? Nor are you the man I take you for, if you're not married into the family before this day twelvemonth! There is no time to be lost, so telegraph back at once. A simple 'Yes' will do, if you accept, which I sincerely hope you will. All the minor arrangements you may safely trust to *me*."

When Mr. O'Shea had read thus far, he arose, and walking with head erect, and well thrown-out chest, towards the looking-glass, he desired to "take stock" of his appearance, and to all semblance was not displeased at the result. He was autumnalizing, it is true; tints were mellowing, colours more sombre, but, on the whole, there was nothing in the landscape, viewed at due distance and with suitable light, to indicate much ravage from Time. Your hard-featured men, like mountains in scenery, preserve the same appearance unchanged by years. It is your genial fellow, with mobile features, that suffers so terribly from age. The plough of Time leaves deep furrows in the arable soil of such faces.

As in those frescoes which depend altogether on colour, the devastations of years are awfully felt; when black degenerates into grey, mellow browns grow a muddy yellow, and the bright touches that "accentuated" expression are little else than unmeaning blotches! If the Member for Inch had not travelled far upon the dreary road, I am bound in truth to own that he had begun the journey. A light, faint silvering showed on his whiskers, like the first touch of snow on an Alpine fern in October. The lines that indicated a ready aptitude for fun had deepened, and grown more marked at the angles at the mouth—a sad sign of one whose wit was less genial and more biting than of yore. Then—worst of all—he had entered upon the pompous lustre wherein men feel an exaggerated self-importance, imagine that their opinions are formed, and their character matured. Nothing is so trying as that quarantine period, and both men and women make more egregious fools of themselves in it than in all the wild heyday of early youth.

Mr. O'Shea, however, was an Irishman, and, in virtue of the fact, he had a light, jaunty, semi-careless way with him, which is a sort of electroplate youth, and looks like the real article, though it won't prove so lasting.

"I must have a look into the Peerage," said he, as he turned to the bulky volume that records the alliances and the ages of the "upper ten thousand:"

"'Lady Maria Augusta Sofronia Montserrat, born'—oh, by the powers, that won't do!—'born 1804.' Oh, come, after all, it's not so bad; 'died in '46.—Charlotte Rose Leopoldine, died in infancy.—Henrietta Louisa, born 1815; married in 1835 to Lord Julius de Raby; again married to Prince Beerstenshoften von Hahnsmarkt, and widowed same year, 1846.' I'll put a mark against her. And there's one more, 'Juliana de Vere, youngest daughter, born '26'—that's the time of day!—born '26, and no more said. The paragraph has yet to be filled with, 'Married to the O'Shea, Member of Parliament for Inchabogue, High Sheriff of Tipperary, and head of the ancient cept known as O'Meadhlin Shamdoodhlin Naboklish O'Shea'—I wonder if they'd put it in—'formerly Kings of Tulloch Reardhin and Bare-mabookle, and all the countries west of the Galtee Mountains.' If pedigree would do it, O'Shea may call himself first favourite! And now, Miss Leslie," continued he, aloud, "you have no time to lose; make your bidding quickly, or the O'Shea will be knocked down to another purchaser. As Eugene Aram says, 'I'm equal to either fortune.'"

"Well," said Joe, entering the room, and approaching his master confidentially, "is it a place?"

"Nothing of the kind; a friendly letter from a member of the Cabinet," replied he, carelessly.

"Devil take them! It isn't friendship we want—it's something to live on."

"You are a low-minded, mercenary creature," said O'Shea, oratorically. "Is our happiness in this life, our self-respect, our real worth, dependent upon the accident of our station, or upon the place we occupy in the affections of men—what we possess of their sympathy and love? I look around me, and what do I see?"

"Sorra bit of me knows," broke in Joe.

Unmindful of the interruption, O'Shea continued: "I see the high places occupied by the crafty, the subtle, and the scheming."

"I wish we had one of them," muttered Joe.

"I see that humble merit shivers at the door, while insolent pretension struts proudly in."

"Ay, and more power to him, if he's able," grumbled out the other.

"I see more," said O'Shea, raising his voice, and extending his arm at full length—"I see a whole nation—eight millions of men—great, glorious, and gifted—men whose genius has shed a lustre over the dull swamp of their oppressors' nature, but who one day, rising from her ashes——"

"Ah! by my conscience, I knew it was comin'; and I said to myself, 'Here's the phaynix!'"

"Rising from her ashes like the Megatherion of Thebes. Where are you now, Master Joe?" said he, with an insolent triumph in his look.

"I'd just as soon have the phaynix," said Joe, doggedly. "Go on."

"How can I go on? How could any man? Demosthenes himself would stand confused in presence of such vulgar interruptions. It is in such temperaments as yours men of genius meet their worst repulses. You are at once the *feræ naturæ* of humanity, and the pestilential atmosphere that poisons—that poisons——"

"Oh! there you are 'pounded!' Poisons what?"

"Poisons the pellucid rills which should fertilize the soul of man! I'm never pounded. O'Connell himself had to confess that he never saw my equal in graceful imagery and figurative embellishment. 'Listening to O'Shea,' says he, 'is like watching a juggler with eight balls flying round and

about him. You may think it impossible he'll be in time, but never one of them will he fail to catch.' That's what *I* call oratory. Why is it, I ask, that, when I rise in the house, you'd hear a pin drop?"

"Maybe they steal out on their tiptoes," said Joe, innocently.

"No, sir, they stand hushed, eager, anxious, as were the Greeks of old to catch the words of Ulysses. I only wish you saw old P—— working away with his pencil while I'm speaking."

"Making a picture of you, maybe!"

"You are as insolent as you are ignorant—one of those who, in the unregenerate brutality of their coarse nature, repel the attempts of all who would advocate the popular cause. I have said so over and over again. If you would constitute yourself the friend of the people, take care to know nothing of them; neither associate with them, nor mix in their society: as Tommy Moore said of Ireland, 'It's a beautiful country to live out of.'"

"And *he* was a patriot!" said Joe, contemptuously.

"There are no patriots among those who soar above the miserable limits of a nationality. Genius has no concern with geographies. To think for the million you must forget the man."

"Say that again. I like the sound of that," cried Joe, admiringly.

"If anything could illustrate the hopelessness of your class and condition in life," continued O'Shea, "it is yourself. There you are, daily, hourly associating with one whose sentiments you hear, whose opinions you learn, whose judgments you record; one eagerly sought after in society, revered in private, honoured in the senate; and what have you derived from these unparalleled advantages? What can you say has been the benefit from these relations?"

"It's hard to say," muttered Joe, "except, maybe, it's made me a philosopher."

"A philosopher!—you a philosopher!"

"Ay; isn't it philosophy to live without wages, and work without pay. 'Tis from yourself I heerd that the finest thing of all is to despise money."

"So it is—so it would be, I mean, if society had not built up that flimsy card edifice it calls civilization. Put out my blue pelisse with the Astracan collar, and my braided vest: I shall want to go over to the Villa this morning. But, first of all, take this to the telegraph-office, 'The O'Shea accepts.'"

"Tear and ages! what is it we've got?" asked Joe, eagerly.

"'The O'Shea accepts'—four words, if they charge for the 'O.' Let me know the cost at once."

"But why don't you tell me where we're going? Is it Jamaica or Jerusalem?"

"Call your philosophy to your aid, and be anxious for nothing," said O'Shea, pompously. "Away, lose no more time."

If Joe had been the exponent of his feelings, as he left the room, he would probably have employed his favourite phrase, and confessed himself "humiliated." He certainly did feel acutely the indignity that had been passed upon him. To live on a precarious diet and no pay was bad enough, but it was unendurable that his master should cease to consult with and confide in him. Amongst the shipwrecked sufferers on a raft, gradations of rank soon cease to be remembered, and of all equalizers there is none like misery! Now, Mr. O'Shea and his man Joe had, so to say, passed years of life upon a raft. They had been storm-tossed and cast away for many a day. Indeed, to push the analogy further, they had more than once drawn lots who should be first devoured—that is to say, they had tossed up whose watch was to go first to the pawnbroker. Now, was it fair or reasonable, if his master discovered a sail in the distance, or a headland on the horizon, that he should conceal the consoling fact, and leave his fellow-sufferer to mourn on in misery. Joe was deeply wounded—he was insulted and outraged.

From the pain of his personal wrongs he was suddenly aroused by the telegraph clerk's demand for thirty francs.

"Thirty francs for four words?"

"You might send twenty for the same sum," was the bland reply.

"Faix, and so we will," said Joe. "Give me a pen and a sheet of paper."

His first inspirations were so full of vengeance, that he actually meditated a distinct refusal of whatever it was had been offered to his master, and his only doubt was how to convey the insolent negative in its most outrageous form. His second and wiser thoughts suggested a little diplomacy, and though both the consideration and the mode of effectuating it cost no small labour, we shall spare the reader's patience, and give him the result arrived at after nearly an hour's exertion, the message transmitted by Joe running thus:—

"Send the fullest particulars about the pay and the name of the place we're going to.

"O'Shea."

"I don't think there will be many secrets after I see the answer to that; and see it I will, if I tear it open!" said Joe, sturdily, as he held his way back to the inn.

A rather warm discussion ensued on the subject of his long absence, O'Shea remarking that for all the use Joe proved himself he might as well be without a servant, and Joe rejoining that, for the matter of pay and treatment, *he* might be pretty nearly as well off if he had no master; these polite passages being interchanged while the O'Shea was busily performing with two hair-brushes, and Joe equally industriously lacing his master's waistcoat, with an artistic skill that the valet of a corpulent gentleman alone attains to, as Joe said a hundred times.

"I wonder why I endure you," said O'Shea, as he jauntily settled his hat on one side of his head, and carefully arranged the hair on the other.

"And you'll wondher more, when I'm gone, why I didn't go before," was Joe's surly rejoinder.

"How did you come by that striped cravat, sir?" asked O'Shea, angrily, as he caught sight of Joe in front.

"I took it out of the drawer."

"It's mine, then!"

"It was wonst. I didn't suppose you'd wear it after what the widow woman said of you up at the Villa—that Mrs. Morris: 'Here's the O'Shea,' says she, 'masquerading as a zebra;' as much as to say it was another baste you was in reality."

"She never dared to be so insolent."

"She did; I heard it myself."

"I don't believe you; I never do believe one word you say."

"That's exactly what I hear whenever I say you're a man of fine fortune and good estate; they all cry out, 'What a lying rascal he is!'"

O'Shea made a spring towards the poker, and Joe as rapidly took up a position behind the dressing-glass.

"Hush!" cried O'Shea, "there's some one at the door."

And a loud summons at the same time confirmed the words. With a ready instinct Joe speedily recovered himself, and hastened to open it.

"Is your master at home?" asked a voice.

"Oh, Heathcote, is it you?" exclaimed O'Shea; "just

step into the next room, and I'll be with you in a second or two. Joe, show Captain Heathcote into the drawing-room."

"I wondher what's the matter with him?" said Joe, confidentially, as he came back. "I never see any one look so low."

"So much the better," said O'Shea, merrily; "it's a sign he's coming to pay money. When a man is about to put you off with a promise, he lounges in with an easy, devil-may-care look, that seems to say, 'It's all one, old fellow, whteher you have an I O or the ready tin.'"

"There's a deal of truth in that," said Joe, approvingly, and with a look that showed how pleasurable it was to him to hear such words of wisdom.

CHAPTER XX.

A DREARY FORENOON.

O'Shea swaggered into the room where Heathcote was standing to await him, in the attitude of one who desired to make his visit as brief as might be.

"How good of you to drive over to this dreary spot," began the Member, jauntily, "where the blue devils seem to have their especial home. I'm hipped and bored here as I never was before. Come, sit down; have you breakfasted?"

"Three hours ago."

"Take some luncheon, then—a glass of sherry, at least."

"Nothing—thanks—it's too early."

"Won't you have even a weed?" said he, opening a cigar-box.

"I'm provided," said the other, showing the half of a still lighted cigar. "I came over this morning, hoping to catch you at home, and make some sort of settlement about our little transactions together."

"My dear fellow, you surely can't think it makes any matter between *us*. I hope you know that it is entirely a

question for your own convenience. No man has more experience of what it is to be 'hit hard,' as they say. When I first came out, I got it. By Jove! didn't I get it, and at both sides of the head, too. It was Mopus's year, when the Yorkshire Lass ran a dead heat with Skyrocket for the Diddlesworth. I stood seventeen to one, in thousands! think of that—seventeen thousand pounds to one against the filly. It was thought so good a thing that Naylor—old Jerry, as they used to call him—offered me a clean thousand to let him take half the wager. But these are old stories now, and they only bore you; in fact, it was just to show you that every man has his turn——"

"I own frankly," broke in Heathcote, "I am far too full of selfish cares to take a proper interest in your story. Just tell me if these figures are correct?" And he turned to look out for a particular page in a small book.

"Confound figures! I wish they never were invented. If one only thinks of all the hearty fellows they've set by the ears, the close friendships they have severed, the strong attachments they have broken, I declare one would be justified in saying it was the devil himself invented arithmetic."

"I wish he'd have made it easier when he was about it," said Heathcote.

"Excellent, by Jove!—how good! 'Made it easier'—capital!" cried O'Shea, laughing with a boisterous jollity that made the room ring. "I hope I'll not forget that. I must book that *mot* of yours."

Heathcote grew crimson with shame, and, in an angry impulse, pitched his cigar into the fire.

"That's right," broke in O'Shea; "these are far better smoking than your cheroots—these are Hudson's 'Grand Viziers,' made especially for Abba Pasha's own smoking."

Heathcote declined, coldly, and continued his search through his note-book.

"It was odd enough," said O'Shea, "just as you came in I was balancing in my own mind whether I'd go over to the Villa, or write to you."

"Write to me!" said the other, reddening.

"Don't be scared; it was not to dun you. No; I was meditating whether it was quite fair of me to take that trap and the nags. *You* like that sort of thing; it suits you, too. Now, I'm sobering down into the period of Park phaetons and George the Fourths: a low step to get in, and a deep, well-cushioned seat, with plenty of leg room; that's more my style. As Holditch says, 'The O'Shea wants an arm-

chair upon C springs and Collinge's patent.' Free and easy that, from a rascally coachmaker, eh?"

"I don't want the horses. I have no use for them. I'm not quite clear whether you valued the whole thing at two hundred and fifty or three hundred and fifty?"

"We said, two fifty," replied O'Shea, in his silkiest of tones.

"Be it so," muttered Heathcote; "I gave two hundred for the chestnut horse at Tattersall's."

"He was dear—too dear," was the dry reply.

"Esterhazy called him the best horse he ever bred."

"He shall have him this morning for a hundred and twenty."

"Well, well," burst in Heathcote, "we are not here to dispute about that. I handed you, as well as I remember, eighty, and two hundred and thirty Naps."

"More than that, I think," said O'Shea, thoughtfully, and as if labouring to recollect clearly.

"I'm certain I'm correct," said Heathcote, haughtily. "I made no other payments than these two—eighty, and two hundred and thirty."

"What a memory I have, to be sure!" said O'Shea, laughingly. "I remember now, it was a rouleau of fifty that I paid away to Layton was running in my head."

Heathcote's lip curled superciliously, but it was only for a second, and his features were calm as before. "Two thirty and eighty make three hundred and ten, and three fifty——"

"Two fifty for the trap!" broke in O'Shea.

"Ah! to be sure, two fifty, make altogether five hundred and sixty Naps., leaving, let me see—ninety-four—sixty-one—one hundred and twelve——"

"A severe night that was. You never won a game!" chimed in O'Shea.

"—One hundred and twelve and seventy, making three hundred and thirty-seven in all. Am I right?"

"Correct as Cocker, only you have forgotten your walk against time, from the fish pond to the ranger's lodge. What was it—ten Naps., or twenty?"

"Neither. It was five, and I paid it!" was the curt answer.

"Ain't I the stupidest dog that ever sat for a borough?" said O'Shea, bursting out into one of his boisterous laughs. "Do you know, I'd have been quite willing to have bet you a cool hundred about that?"

"And you'd have lost," said Heathcote, dryly.

"Not a doubt of it, and deserved it, too," said he, merrily.

"I have brought you here one hundred and fifty," said

Heathcote, laying down three rouleaux on the table, "and, for the remainder, my note at three months. I hope that may not prove inconvenient?"

"Inconvenient, my boy! never say the word. Not to mention that fortune may take a turn one of these days, and all this California find its way back to its own diggings."

"I don't mean to play any more."

"Not play any more! Do you mean to say that, because you have been once repulsed, you'll never charge again? Is that your soldier's pluck?"

"There is no question here of my soldier's pluck. I only said I'd not play billiards."

"May I ask you one thing? How can you possibly expect to attain excellence in any pursuit, great or small, when you are so easily abashed?"

"May I take the same liberty with you, and ask how can it possibly concern any one but myself that I have taken this resolution?"

"There you have me! a hazard and no mistake! I may be your match at billiards, but when it comes to repartee you are the better man, Heathcote."

Coarse as the flattery was, it was not unpleasing. Indeed, in its very coarseness there was a sort of mock sincerity, just as the stroke of a heavy hand on your shoulder is occasionally taken for good fellowship, though you wince under the blow. Now Heathcote was not only gratified by his own smartness, but after a moment or two he felt half sorry he had been so "severe on the poor fellow." He had over-shotted his gun, and there was really no necessity to rake him so heavily; and so, with a sort of blundering bashfulness, he said,—

"You're not offended—you're not angry with me?"

"Offended! angry! nothing of the kind. I believe I am a peppery sort of fellow—at least, down in the west there they say as much of me—but once a man is my friend—once that I feel all straight and fair between us—he may bowl me over ten times a day, and I'll never resent it."

There was a pause after this, and Heathcote found his position painfully awkward. He did not fancy exactly to repudiate the friendship thus assumed, and he certainly did not like to put his name to the bond; and so he walked to the window and looked out with that half-hopeless vacuity bashful men are prone to.

"What's the weather going to do?" said he, carelessly. "More rain?"

Of course, more rain! Amongst all the humbugs of the

day, do you know of one equal to the humbug of the Italian climate? Where's the blue sky they rave about?"

"Not there, certainly," said Heathcote, laughing, as he looked up at the leaden-coloured canopy that lowered above them.

"My father used to say," said O'Shea, "that it was all a mistake to talk about the damp climate of Ireland; the real grievance was, that when it rained it always rained dirty water!"

The conceit amused Heathcote, and he laughed again. "There it comes now, and with a will, too!" And at the same instant, with a rushing sound like hail, the rain poured down with such intensity as to shut out the hills directly in front of the windows.

"You're caught this time, Heathcote. Make the best of it, like a man, and resign yourself to eat a mutton-chop here with me at four o'clock; and if it clears in the evening, I'll canter back with you."

"No, no, the weather will take up—this is only a shower. They'll expect me back to dinner, besides. Confound it, how it does come down!"

"Oh, faith!" said O'Shea, half mournfully, "I don't wonder that you are less afraid of the rain than a bad dinner."

"No, it's not that—nothing of the kind," broke in Heathcote, hurriedly; "at another time I should be delighted! Who ever saw such rain as that!"

"Look at the river, too. See how it is swollen already."

"Ah! I never thought of the mountain torrents," said Heathcote, suddenly.

"They'll be coming down like regular cataracts by this time. I defy any one to cross at Borgo even now. Take my advice, Heathcote, and reconcile yourself to old Pan's cookery for to-day."

"What time do you dine?"

"What time will suit you? Shall we say four or five?"

"Four, if you'll permit me. Four will do capitally."

"That's all right. And now I'll just step down to Panini myself, and give him a hint about some Burgundy he has got in the cellar."

Like most men yielding to necessity, Heathcote felt discontented and irritated, and no sooner was he alone than he began to regret his having accepted the invitation. What signified a wetting? He was on horseback, to be sure, but he was well mounted, and it was only twelve miles—an hour, or an hour and a quarter's, sharp canter; and as to the

torrents, up to the girths, perhaps, or a little beyond—it could scarcely come to swimming. Thus he argued with himself as he walked to and fro, and chafed and fretted as he went. It was in this irritated state O'Shea found him when he came back.

"We're all right. They've got a brace of woodcock below stairs, and some Pistoja mutton; and as I have forbidden oil and all the grease-pots, we'll manage to get a morsel to eat."

"I was just thinking how stupid I was to—to—to put you to all this inconvenience," said he, hastily changing a rudeness into an apology.

"Isn't it a real blessing for me to catch you?" cried O'Shea. "Imagine me shut up here by myself all day, no one to speak to, nothing to do, nothing to read but that old volume of the 'Wandering Jew,' that I begin to know by heart, or, worse again, that speech of mine on the Italian question, that whenever I've nearly finished it the villains are sure to do something or other that destroys all my predictions and ruins my argument. What would have become of me to-day if you hadn't dropped in?"

Heathcote apparently did not feel called upon to answer this inquiry, but walked the room moodily, with his hands in his pockets.

O'Shea gave a little faint sigh—such a sigh as a weary pedestrian may give, as, turning the angle of the way, he sees seven miles of straight road before him, without bend or curve. It was now eleven o'clock, and five dreary hours were to be passed before dinner-time.

Oh, my good reader, has it been amongst your life's experiences to have submitted to an ordeal of this kind—to be caged up of a wet day with an unwilling guest, whom you are called on to amuse, but know not how to interest; to feel that you are bound to employ his thoughts, with the sad consciousness, that in every pause of the conversation he is cursing his hard fate at being in your company; to know that you must deploy all the resources of your agreeability without even a chance of success, your very efforts to amuse constituting in themselves a boredom? It is as great a test of temper as of talent. Poor O'Shea, one cannot but pity you! To be sure, you are not without little aids to pass time, in the shape of cards, dice, and such-like. I am not quite sure that a travelling roulette-table is not somewhere amongst your effects. But of what use are they all *now?* None would think of a lecture on anatomy to a man who had just suffered amputation.

No, no! play must not be thought of—it must be most sparingly alluded to even in conversation—and so what remains? O'Shea was not without reminiscences, and he "went into them like a man." He told scenes of early Trinity College life; gave sketches of his contemporaries, one or two of them now risen to eminence; he gave anecdotes of Gray's Inn, where he had eaten his terms; of Templar life, its jollities and its gravities; of his theatrical experiences, when he wrote the "Drama" for two weekly periodicals; of his like employ when he reported prize-fights, boat-races, and pigeon-matches for *Bell's Life*. He then gave a sketch of his entrance into public life, with a picture of an Irish election, dashed off spiritedly and boldly; but all he could obtain from his phlegmatic listener was a faint smile at times, and a low muttering sound, that resolved itself into, "What snobs!"

At last he was in the House, dealing with great names and great events, which he ingeniously blended up with Bellamy's and the oyster suppers below stairs; but it was no use—they, too, were snobs! It was all snobbery everywhere. Freshmen, Templars, Pugilists, Scullers, County Electors, and House of Commons celebrities—all snobs!

O'Shea then tried the Turf—disparagingly, as a great moralist ought. They were, as he said, a "bad lot;" but he knew them well, and they "couldn't hurt *him*." He had a variety of curious stories about racing knaveries, and could clear up several mysterious circumstances, which all the penetration of the "Ring" had never succeeded in solving. Heathcote, however, was unappeasable; and these, too—trainers, jockeys, judges, and gentlemen—they were all snobs!

It was only two o'clock, and there were two more mortal hours to get through before dinner. With a bright inspiration he bethought him of bitter beer. Oh, Bass! ambrosia of the barrack-room, thou nectar of the do-nothings in this life, how gracefully dost thou deepen dulness into drowsiness, making stupidity but semi-conscious! What a bond of union art thou between those who have talked themselves out, and would without thy consoling froth, become mutually odious! Instead of the torment of suggestiveness which other drinks inspire, how gloriously lethargic are all thy influences, how mind-quelling, and how muddling!

There is, besides, a vague notion prevalent with your beer drinker, that there is some secret of health in his indulgence—that he is undergoing a sort of tonic regimen, something

to make him more equal to the ascent of Mont Blanc, or the defeat of the Zouaves, and he grows in self-esteem as he sips. It is not the boastful sentiment begotten of champagne, or the defiant courage of port, but a dogged, resolute, resistant spirit, stout in its nature and bitter to the last!

And thus they sipped, and smoked, and said little to each other, and the hours stole over, and the wintry day darkened apace, and, at last, out of a drowsy nap over the fire, the waiter awoke them, to say dinner was on the table.

"You were asleep!" said O'Shea to his companion.

"Yes, 'twas your snoring set me off!" replied Heathcote, stretching himself, as he walked to the window. "Raining just as hard as ever!"

"Come along," said the other, gaily. "Let us see what old Pan has done for us."

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. O'SHEA UPON POLITICS, AND THINGS IN GENERAL.

It was a most appetizing little dinner that was now set before the O'Shea and Charles Heathcote. The trout from Castellano, and the mutton from Pistoja, were each admirable; and a brace of woodcocks, shot in the first snow-storm on the Carrara mountains, were served in a fashion that showed the cook had benefited by English teachings.

"There are worse places than this, after all!" said O'Shea, as he sat at one side of the fire, Heathcote opposite, and a small table liberally covered with decanters between them.

"Wonderful Burgundy this," said Heathcote, gazing at his glass in the light. "What does he call it?"

"He calls it Lafitte. These fellows think all red wines come from the Bordeaux country. Here it is—marked seven francs."

"Cheap at double the price. My governor will take every bottle of it."

"Not before I leave, I hope," said O'Shea, laughing. "I trust he'll respect what they call vested interests."

"Oh, by the way," said the other, indolently, "you *are* going?"

"Yes. Our party are getting uneasy, and I am constantly receiving letters pressing me to return to England."

"Want you in the House, perhaps?" said Heathcote, as he puffed his cigar in lazy enjoyment.

"Just so. You see, a parliamentary session is a sort of campaign in which every arm of warfare is needed. You want your great guns for the grand battles, your dashing cavalry charges for emergencies, and your light skirmishers to annoy the enemy and disconcert his advance."

"And which are *you?*" asked the other, in a tone of bantering indifference.

"Well, I'm what you might call a mounted rifleman—a dash of the dragoon with a spice of the sharpshooter."

"Sharp enough, I take it," muttered Heathcote, who bethought him of the billiard-table, and the wonderful "hazards" O'Shea used to accomplish.

"You understand," resumed the Member, confidentially, "I don't come out on the Budget, or Reform, or things of that kind; but I lie by till I hear some one make a blunder or a mistake, no matter how insignificant, and then I'm down on him, generally with an anecdote—something he reminds me of—and for which I'm sure to have the laugh against him. It's so easy, besides, to make them laugh; the worst jokes are always successful in the House of Commons."

"Dull fellows, I suppose?" chimed in Heathcote.

"No, indeed; not that. Go down with six or eight of them to supper, and you'll say you never met pleasanter company. 'Tis being caged up there altogether, saying the same things over and over, that's what destroys them."

"It must be a bore, I take it?" sighed out Heathcote.

"I'll tell you what it is," said O'Shea, as, in a voice of deepest confidence, he leaned over the table and spoke—"I'll tell you what it is. Did you ever play the game called Brag, with very little money in your pocket?"

Heathcote nodded what might mean assent or the opposite.

"That's what Parliament is," resumed O'Shea. "You sit there, night after night, year after year, wondering within yourself, 'Would it be safe for me to play this hand? shall I venture now?' You know well that if you *do* back your luck and lose, that it's all up with you for ever, so that it's really a mighty serious thing to risk it. At last, maybe, you

take courage. You think you've got the cards; it's half-past two o'clock; the House is thin, and every one is tired and sleepy. Up you get on your legs to speak. You're not well down again, till a fellow from the back benches, you thought sound asleep, gets up and tears all you said to tatters; destroys your facts, scatters your inferences, and maybe laughs at your figures of speech."

"Not so pleasant, that," said Heathcote, languidly.

"Pleasant! it's the devil!" said O'Shea, violently; "for you hear the pen scratching away up in the reporters' gallery, and you know it will be all over Europe next morning."

"Then why submit to all this?" asked Heathcote, more eagerly.

"Just as I said a while ago; because you might chance upon a good card, and 'brag' on it for something worth while. It's all luck."

"Your picture of political life is not fascinating," said Heathcote, coldly.

"After all, do you know, I like it," resumed O'Shea. "As long as you've a seat in the House, there's no saying when you mightn't be wanted; and then, when the session's over, and you go down to the country, you are the terror of all the fellows that never sat in Parliament. If they say a word about public matters, you put them down at once with a cool 'I assure you, sir, that's not the view we take of it in the House.'"

"I'd say, 'What's that to *me?*'"

"No, you wouldn't—not a bit of it; or, if you did, nobody would mind you, and for this reason—it's the *real* place, after all. Why do you pay Storr and Mortimer more than another jeweller? Just because you're sure of the article. There now, that's how it is!"

"There's some one knocking at the door, I think," said Heathcote; but at the same instant Joe's head appeared inside, with a request to be admitted. "'Tis the telegraph," said he, presenting a packet.

"I have asked for a small thing in Jamaica—some ten or twelve hundred a year"—whispered O'Shea to his friend. "I suppose this is the reply." And at the same time he threw the portentous envelope carelessly on the table.

Either Heathcote felt no interest in the subject, or deemed it proper to seem as indifferent as his host, for he never took any further notice of the matter, but smoked away as before.

"You needn't wait," said O'Shea to Joe, who still lingered at the door. "That fellow is bursting with curiosity now,"

said he, as the man retired; "he'd give a year's wages to know what was inside that envelope."

"Indeed!" sighed out Heathcote, in a tone that showed how little he sympathized with such eagerness.

If O'Shea was piqued at this cool show of indifference, he resolved to surpass it by appearing to forget the theme altogether; and, pushing the bottle across the table, he said, "Did I ever tell you how it was I first took to politics?"

"No, I think not," said Heathcote, listlessly.

"Well, it was a chance, and a mere chance; this is the way it happened. Though I was bred to the Bar I never did much at the law; some say that an agreeable man, with a lively turn in conversation, plenty of anecdote, and a rich fancy, is never a favourite with the attorneys; the rascals always think that such a man will never make a lawyer, and though they'll listen to his good stories by the hour in the Hall, devil a brief they'll give him, nor so much as a 'declaration.' Well, for about five years I walked about in wig and gown, joking, and quizzing, and humbugging all the fellows that were getting business, and taking a circuit now and again, but all to no good; and at last I thought I'd give it up, and so my friends advised me, saying, 'Get something under the Government, Gorman; a snug place with a few hundreds a year, and be sure take anything that's offered you to begin with.'

"Now there was a room in Dublin Castle—it's the second down the corridor off the private stairs—that used to be called the Poker-room. It may be so still for anything I know, and for this reason; it was there all the people expecting places or appointments were accustomed to wait. It was a fine, airy, comfortable room, with a good carpet, easy-chairs, and always an excellent fire; and here used to meet every day of their lives the same twenty or five-and-twenty people, one occasionally dropping off, and another coming in, but so imperceptibly and gradually, that the gathering at last grew to be a sort of club, where they sat from about eleven till dark every day, chatting pleasantly over public and private events. It was thus found necessary to give it a kind of organization, and so we named for President the oldest—that is, the longest expectant of place—who, by virtue of his station, occupied the seat next the fire, and alone, of all the members, possessed the privilege of poking it. The poker was his badge of office; and the last act of his official life, whenever promotion separated him from us, was to hand the poker to his successor, with a solemn dignity of manner and a few

parting words. I verily believe that most of us got to be so fond of the club, that it was the very reverse of a pleasure, when we had to leave it to become, maybe, a Police Inspector at Skibbereen, Postmaster at Tory Island, or a Gauger at Innismagee; and so we jogged on, from one Viceroy to another, very happy and contented. Well, it was the time of a great Marquis—I won't say who, but he was the fast friend of O'Connell—and we all of us thought that there would be plenty of fine things given away, and the poker-room was crammed, and I was the President, having ascended the throne two years and a half before. It was somewhere early in March; a cold raw day it was. I had scarcely entered the club, than a messenger bawled out, 'Gorman O'Shea—Mr. Gorman O'Shea.' 'Here he is,' said I. 'Wanted in the Chief Secretary's office,' said he, 'immediately.' I gave a knowing wink to the company around the fire, and left the room. Three mortal hours did I stand in the ante-room below, seeing crowds pass in and out before I was called in; and then, as I entered, saw a little wizened, sharp-faced man standing with his back to the fire paring his nails. He never so much as looked at me, but said, in a careless, muttering sort of way,—

"You're the gentleman who wishes to go as resident magistrate to Oackatoro, ain't you?"

"'Well, indeed, sir, I'm not quite sure,' I began.

"'Oh yes, you are,' broke he in. 'I know all about you. Your name has been favourably mentioned to the office. You are Mr. O'Gorman——'

"'Mr. Gorman O'Shea,' said I, proudly.

"'The same thing, Gorman O'Shea. I remember it now. Your appointment will be made out: five hundred a year, and a retiring pension after six years; house, and an allowance for monkeys.'

"'A what?' asked I.

"'The place is much infested with a large species of ourang-outang, and the Governor gives so much per head for destroying them. Mr. Simpson, in the office, will give you full information. You are to be at your post by the 1st of August.'

"'Might I make bold to ask where Whackatory is?'

"'Oackatoro, sir,' said he, proudly, 'is the capital of Fighi. I trust I need not say where that is.'

"'By no means,' said I, modestly; and, muttering my thanks for the advancement, I backed out, almost deranged to think that I didn't know where I was going.

"'Where is it? What is it? How much is it, O'Shea?' cried thirty ardent voices as I entered the club.

"'It's five hundred a year,' said I, 'without counting the monkeys. It's a magistrate's place; but may a gooseberry skin make a nightcap for me if I know where the devil it is!'

"'But you have accepted!' cried they out all together.

"'I have,' said I. 'I'm to be at Fighi, wherever that is, by the 1st of August. And now,' said I, turning to the fire, and taking up the poker, 'there is nothing for me to do but resign this sacred symbol of my office into the hands of my successor.'

"'Where's O'Dowd?' shouted out the crowd. And they awoke out of a pleasant sleep a little old fellow that never missed his day for two years at the club.

"'Gentlemen,' said I, in a voice trembling with feeling, 'the hour is come when my destiny is to separate me from you for ever; an hour that is equally full of the past and the future, and has even no small share of present emotions. If ever there were a human institution devised to cement together the hearts and affections of men, to bind them into one indissoluble mass, and blend their instincts into identity, it is the club we have here. Here we stand, like the departed spirits at the Styx, waiting for the bark of Charon to ferry us over. To what, however? Is it to some blessed elysium of a Poor Law Commissioner's place, or is it to some unknown fate in a distant land, with five hundred a year and an allowance for monkeys? That's the question, there's the rub! as Hamlet says.' After dilating at large on this, I turned to O'Dowd. 'To your hands,' said I, 'I commit this venerable relic: keep it, guard it, honour it, and preserve it. Remember,' said I, 'that when you stir those coals it is the symbol of keeping alive in the heart the sparks of an undying hope; that though they may wet the slack and water the cinders of our nature, the fire within us will still survive, red, glowing, and generous. Isn't that as fine, as great, glorious, and free, I ask you?'

"Who is that fellow that's talking there, with a voice like Lablache?' asked a big man at the door; and then, as the answer was whispered in his ear, he said, 'Send him out here to me.'

Out I went, and found myself face to face with O'Connell.

"'I want a man to stand for Drogheda to-morrow; the gentleman I expected cannot arrive there possibly before three. Will you address the electors, and speak till he

comes? If he isn't there by half-past three, you shall be returned!'

"'Done!' said I. And by five o'clock on the following evening Gorman O'Shea was at the top of the poll and declared Member for Drogheda! That was, I may say, the first lift I ever got from Fortune. May I never!" exclaimed O'Shea, half angrily—"may I never, if he's not asleep—and snoring! These Saxons beat the world for stupidity."

The Member now suddenly bethought him that it would be a favourable moment to read his telegram, and so he tore open the envelope, and held it to the light. It was headed as usual, and addressed in full, showing that no parsimony defrauded him of his full title. The body of the despatch was, however, brief enough, and contained only one word, "Bosh!" It was clear, bold, and unmistakably "Bosh!" Could insolence go further than that? To send such a message a thousand miles, at the cost of one pound fourteen and sixpence!

"What the deuce? you've nearly upset the table!" cried Heathcote, waking suddenly up, as O'Shea, with a passionate gesture had thrown one of the decanters into the other's lap.

"I was asleep, like yourself, I suppose," said the Member, roughly. "I must say, we are neither of us the very liveliest company."

"It was that yarn of yours about attacking monkeys with a poker, or some stuff of that kind, set me off," yawned Heathcote, drearily. "I had not felt the least sleepy till then."

"Here, let us fill our glasses, and drink to the jolly time that is coming for us," said O'Shea, with all his native recklessness.

"With all my heart; but I wish I could guess from what quarter it's coming," said Heathcote, despondingly.

If neither felt much disposed to converse, they each drank deeply, and although scarcely more than a word or two would pass between them, they sat thus, hour after hour, till it was long past midnight.

It was after a long silence between them that Heathcote said, "I never tried so hard in my life to get drunk, without success. I find it won't do, though; I'm just as clear-headed and as low-spirited as when I started."

"Bosh!" muttered O'Shea, half dreamily.

"It's no such thing!" retorted Heathcote. "At any

ordinary time one bottle of that strong Burgundy would have gone to my head; and see, now I don't feel it."

"Maybe you're fretting about something. It's perhaps a weight on your heart——"

"That's it!" sighed out the other, as though the very avowal were an inexpressible relief to him.

"Is it for a woman?" asked O'Shea.

The other nodded, and then leaned his head on his hand.

"Upon my conscience, I sometimes think they're worse than the Jews," said the Member, violently; "and there's no being 'up to them.'"

"It's our own fault, then," cried Heathcote; "because we never play fairly with them."

"Bosh!" muttered O'Shea again.

"I defy you to deny it," cried he, angrily.

"I'd like a five-pound note to argue it either way," said O'Shea.

As if offended by the levity of the speech, Heathcote turned away and said nothing.

"When you get down to Rome, and have some fun over those ox-fences, you'll forget all about her, whoever she is," said O'Shea.

"I'm for England to-morrow, and for India next week, if they'll have me."

"Well, if that's not madness——"

"No, sir, it is not," broke in Heathcote, angrily; "nor will I permit you or any other man to call it so."

"What I meant was, that when a fellow had *your* prospects before him, India oughtn't to tempt him, even with the offer of the Governor-Generalship."

"Forgive me my bad temper, like a good fellow," cried Heathcote, grasping the other's hand; "but, in honest truth, I have no prospects, no future, and there is not a more hopeless wretch to be found than the man before you."

O'Shea was very near saying "Bosh!" one more, but he coughed it under.

Like all bashful men who have momentarily given way to impatience, Charles Heathcote was over eager to obtain his companion's good will, and so he dashed at once into a full confession of all the difficulties that beset, and all the cares that surrounded, him. O'Shea had never known accurately, till now, the amount of May Leslie's fortune, nor how completely she was the mistress of her own fate. Neither had he ever heard of that strange provision in the will which imposed a forfeit upon her if unwilling to accept Charles

Heathcote as her husband—a condition which he shrewdly judged to be the very surest of all ways to prevent their marriage.

"And so you released her?" cried he, as Heathcote finished his narrative.

"Released her! No. I never considered that she was bound. How could I?"

"Upon my conscience," muttered the O'Shea, "it is a hard case—a mighty hard case—to see one's way in; for if, as you say, it's not a worthy part for a man to compel a girl to be his wife just because her father put it in his will, it's very cruel to lose her only because she has a fine property."

"It is for no such reason," broke in Heathcote, half angrily. "I was unwilling—I am unwilling—that May Leslie should be bound by a contract she never shared in."

"That's all balderdash!" cried O'Shea, with energy.

"What do you mean, sir?" retorted the other passionately.

"What I mean is this," resumed he: "that it's all balderdash to talk of the hardship of doing things that we never planned out for ourselves. Sure, ain't we doing them every moment of our lives? Ain't I doing something because you contrived it? and ain't you doing something else because I left it in your way?"

"It comes to this, then, that you'd marry a girl who didn't care for you, if the circumstances were such as to oblige her to accept you?"

"Not absolutely—not unreservedly," replied O'Shea.

"Well, what is the reservation? Let us hear it."

"Her fortune ought to be suitable."

"Oh, this is monstrous!"

"Hear me out before you condemn me. In marriage, as in everything else, you must take it out in malt or in meal: don't fancy that you're going to get love and money too. It's only in novels such luck exists."

"I'm very glad I do not share your sentiments," said Charles, sternly.

"They're practical, anyway. But now to another point. Here we are, sitting by the fire in all frankness and candour. Answer me fairly two questions: Have you given up the race?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, have you any objection if I enter for the stakes myself?"

"You! Do you mean that you would propose for May Leslie?"

"I do; and, what's more, I don't despair of success, either."

An angry flush rose to Heathcote's face, and for a moment it seemed as if his passion was about to break forth; but he mastered it, and, rising slowly, said: "If I thought such a thing possible, it would very soon cure me of *one* sorrow." After a pause, he added: "As for *me*, I have no permission to give or to withhold. Go, by all means, and make your offer. I only ask one thing: it is, that you will honestly tell me afterwards how it has been received."

"That I pledge my word to. Where do you stop in Paris?"

"At the Windsor."

"Well, you shall have a despatch from me, or see myself there, by Saturday evening; one or the other I swear to."

"Agreed. I'll not wish you success, for that would be hypocritical, but I'll wish you well over it!" And with this speech, uttered in a tone of jeering sarcasm, Heathcote said good-bye, and departed.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PUBLIC SERVANT ABROAD.

We scarcely thought that the distinguish public servant, Mr. Ogden, was likely to occupy once more any portion of our readers' attention; and yet it so fell out that this useful personage, being on the Continent getting up his Austria and Northern Italy for the coming session, received a few lines from the Earl of Sommerville, half mandatory, half entreating, asking him to find out the young Marquis of Agincourt, and take him back with him to England.

Now the Earl was a great man, for he was father-in-law of a Cabinet Minister, and related to half the leaders of the party, so that Mr. Ogden, however little the mission suited his other plans, was fain at once to accept it, and set out in search of his charge.

We need not follow him in his pursuit through Lombardy and the Legations, down to Tuscany and Lucca, which latter city he reached at the close of a cold and dreary day of winter, cheered to him, however, by the certainty that he had at length come up with the object of his chase.

It was a habit with Quackinboss, whenever he sent out Layton's servant on an errand, to leave the house door ajar, that the sick man might not be disturbed by the loud summons of the bell; and so on the evening in question was it found by Mr. Ogden, who, after some gentle admonitions by his knuckles, and some preparatory coughs, at last groped his way into the interior, and eventually entered the spacious sitting-room. Quackinboss had dined, and was seated at his wine beside an ample fireplace, with a blazing wood fire. An old-fashioned screen sheltered him from the draught of the ill-fitting windows, while a comfortable buffalo rug was stretched under his feet. The Colonel was in his second cigar, and in the drowsy mood of its easy enjoyment, when the harsh accents of Mr. Ogden's voice startled him, by asking, "Can you inform me if Lord Agincourt lives here?"

"You're a Britisher now, I expect?" said the Colonel, as he slowly puffed out a long volume of smoke, but never moved from his seat.

"My question having the precedence, sir, it will be, perhaps, more regular to answer it first," said Ogden, with a slow pertinacity.

"Well, I ain't quite sure o' that, stranger," drawled out the other. "Mine was a sort of an amendment, and so might be put before the original motion."

The remark chimed in well with the humour of one never indisposed to word-fencing, and so he deferred to the suggestion, told his name and his object in coming, "And now, sir," added he, "I hope not to be deemed indiscreet in asking an equal candour from you."

"You ain't a doctor?" asked Quackinboss.

"No, sir; not a physician, at least."

"That's a pity," said Quackinboss, slowly, as he brushed the ashes off his cigar. "Help yourself, stranger; that's claret, t'other's the country wine, and this is cognac—all three bad o' their kind; but, as they say here to everything, 'Come si fa, eh? Come si fa!'"

"It is not from any disparagement of your hospitality, sir," said Ogden, somewhat pompously, "that I am forced to recall you to my first question."

"Come si fa!" repeated Quackinboss, still ruminating over the philosophy of that expression, one of the very few he had ever succeeded in committing to memory.

"Am I to conclude, sir, that you decline giving me the information I ask?"

"I ain't in a witness-box, stranger. I'm a-sittin' at my own fireside. I'm a-smokin' my Virginian, where I've a right to, and if *you* choose to come in neighbourly-like, and take a liquor with me, we'll talk it over, whatever it is; but if you think to come Holy Office and the Inquisition over Shaver Quackinboss, you've caught the wrong squirrel by the tail, Britisher, you have!"

"I must say, sir, you have put a most forced and unfair construction upon a very simple circumstance. I asked you if the Marquis of Agincourt resided here?"

"And so you ain't a doctor?" said Quackinboss, pensively.

"No, sir; I have already told you as much."

"Bred to the law, belike?"

"I *have* studied, sir, but not practised as a lawyer."

"Well, now, I expected you was!" said Quackinboss, with an air of self-satisfaction. "You chaps betray yourselves sooner than any other class in all creation; as Flay Harris says: 'A lawyer is a fellow won't drink out of the bung-hole,

but must always be for tapping the cask for himself.' You ain't long in these parts?"

"No, sir; a very short time indeed," said Ogden, drearily.

"You needn't sigh about it, stranger, though it is main dull in these diggin's! Here's a people that don't understand human natur'. What I mean, sir, is, human natur' means goin' ahead; doin' a somewhat your father and your grandfather never so much as dreamt of. But what are these critturs about? Jest showin' the great things that was done centeries before they was born—what pictures, and statues, and monuments their own ancestors could make, and of which they are jest showmen, nothing more!"

"The Arts are Italy's noblest inheritance," said Ogden, sententiously.

"That ain't my platform, stranger. Civilization never got anything from painters or sculptors. They never taught mankind to be truthful, or patient, or self-denyin', or charitable. You may look at a bronze Hercules till you're black in the face, and it will never make you give a cent to a lame cripple. I'll go further again, stranger, and I'll say that there ain't anything has thrown so many stumblin'-blocks before pro-gress as what you call the Arts, for there ain't the equal o' them to make people idlers. What's all that loafing about galleries, I ask ye, but the worst of all idling? If you want them sort of emotions, go to the real article, sir. Look at an hospital, that's more life-life than Gerard Dow and his dropsical woman—ay, and may touch your heart, belike, before you get away."

"Though your conversation interests me much, sir, you will pardon my observing that I feel myself an intruder."

"No you ain't; I'm jest in a talkin' humour, and I'd rather have *you* than that Italian crittur, as don't understand me."

"Even the flattery of your observation, sir, cannot make me forget that another object claims my attention."

"For I've remarked," resumed Quackinboss, as if in continuation of his speech, "that a foreigner, that don't know English, wearies after a while in listenin', even though you're tellin' him very interesting things."

"I perceive sir," said Ogden, rising, "that I have certainly been mistaken in the address. I was told that at the Palazzo Barsotti——"

"Well, you're jest there; that's what they call this ramshackle old crazy consarn. Their palaces, bein' main like

their nobility, would be all the better for a little washin' and smartenin' up.

"You can perhaps, however, inform me where Lord Agincourt *does* live?"

"Well, he lives, as I may say, a little promiscuous. If he ain't *here*, it's because he's *there!* You understand?"

"I cannot say very confidently that I do understand," said Ogden, slowly.

"It was well as you wasn't a practisin' lawyer, Britisher, for you ain't smart! that's a fact. No, sir; you ain't smart!"

"Your countrymen's estimate of that quality has a high standard, sir," said Ogden, haughtily.

"What do you mean by my countrymen?" asked the other, quickly.

"I ventured to presume that you were an American," said Ogden, with a supercilious smile.

"Well, stranger, you were main right; though darn me con-siderable if I know how you discovered it. Don't you be a-goin', now that we're gettin' friendly together. Set down a bit. Maybe you'd taste a morsel of something."

"Excuse me, I have just dined."

"Well, mix a summut in your glass. It's a rare pleasure to me, stranger, to have a chat with a man as talks like a Christian. I'm tired of 'come si fa'—that's a fact, sir."

"I regret that I cannot profit by your polite invitation," said Ogden, bowing stiffly. "I had been directed to this house as the residence of Lord Agincourt and his tutor, and as neither of them live here——"

"Who told you that? There's one of them a-bed in that room there; he's caught swamp-fever, and it's gone up to the head. He's the tutor—poor fellow."

"And the Marquis?"

"The Marquis! he's a small parcel to have such a big direction on him, ain't he? He's at a villa, a few miles off; but he'll be over here to-morrow morning."

"You are quite sure of that?" asked Ogden.

"Yes, sir," said Quackinboss, drinking off his glass, and nodding, in token of salutation.

"I must beg you to accept my excuses for this intrusion on my part," began Ogden.

"Jest set you down there again; there's a point I'd like to be cleared up about. I'm sure you'll not refuse me. Jest set down."

Ogden resumed his seat, although with an air and manner of no small disinclination.

"No wine, thank you. Excuse me," said he, stiffly, as Quackinboss tried to fill his glass.

"You remarked a while ago," said Quackinboss, slowly, and like a man weighing all his words, "that I was an American born. Now, sir, it ain't a very likely thing that any man who was ever raised in the States is goin' to deny it. It ain't, I say, very probable as he'd say I'm a Chinese, or a Mexican, or a Spaniard; no, nor a Britisher. Whatever we do in this life, stranger, one thing, I suppose, is pretty certain—we don't say the worst of ourselves. Ain't that your platform, sir?"

"I agree to the general principle."

"Agreein', then, to the gen'ral principle, here's where we go next, for I ain't a-goin' to let you off, Britisher—I've got a harpoon in you now, and I'll tow you after me into shoal water; see if I don't. Agreein', as we say, to the gen'ral principle, that no man likes to make his face blacker than it need be, what good could it do me to say that I wasn't born a free citizen of the freest country of the universe?"

"I am really at a loss to see how I am interested in this matter. I have not, besides, that perfect leisure abstract discussion requires. You will forgive me if I take my leave." He moved hastily towards the door as he spoke, followed by Quackinboss, whose voice had now assumed the full tones and the swelling modulations of public oratory.

"That great land, sanctified by the blood of the pilgrim fathers, and whose proudest boast it is, that from the first day, when the star-spangled banner of Freedom dallied with the wind and scorned the sun, waving its barred folds over the heads of routed enemies—to that glorious consummation, when, from the rugged plains of New England to the golden groves of Florida——"

"Good-bye, sir—good evening," said Ogden, passing out and gaining the landing-place.

"—One universal shout, floating over the Atlantic waters, proclaimed to the Old World that the 'Young' was alive and kickin'——"

"Good night," cried Ogden, from the bottom of the stairs; and Quackinboss re-entered his chamber and banged the door after him, muttering something to himself about Lexington and Concord, Columbus and Quincey Adams.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BROKEN TIES.

It was a sorrowful morning at the Villa Caprini on the 22nd of November. Agincourt had come to take his last farewell of his kind friends, half heart-broken that he was not permitted even to see poor Layton before he went. Quackinboss, however, was obdurate on the point, and would suffer no one to pass the sick man's door. Mr. Ogden sat in the carriage as the boy dashed hurriedly into the house to say "Good-bye." Room after room he searched in vain. No one to be met with. What could it mean?—the drawing-room, the library, all empty!

"Are they all out, Fenton?" cried he, at last.

"No, my Lord, Sir William was here a moment since, Miss Leslie is in her room, and Mrs. Morris, I think, is in the garden."

To the garden he hurried off at once, and just caught sight of Mrs. Morris and Clara, as, side by side, they turned the angle of an alley.

"At last!" cried he, as he came up with them. "At last I have found some one. Here have I been this half-hour in search of you all, over house and grounds. Why, what's the matter?—what makes you look so grave?"

"Don't you know?—haven't you heard?" cried Mrs. Morris, with a sigh.

"Heard what?"

"Heard that Charles has gone off—started for England last night, with the intention of joining the first regiment ordered for India."

"I wish to Heaven he'd have taken me with him!" cried the boy, eagerly.

"Very possibly," said she, dryly; "but Charles was certainly to blame for leaving a home of happiness and affection in this abrupt way. I don't see how poor Sir William is ever to get over it, not to speak of leaving May Leslie. I hope, Agincourt, this is not the way you'll treat the young lady you're betrothed to."

"I'll never get myself into any such scrape, depend on't. Poor Charley!"

"Why not poor May?" whispered Mrs. Morris.

"Well, poor May too, if she cared for him; but I don't think she did."

"Oh, what a shame to say so! I'm afraid you young gentlemen are brought up in great heresies now-a-days, and don't put any faith in love."

Had the boy been an acute observer, he would have marked how little the careless levity of the remark coincided with the assumed sadness of her former manner, but he never noticed this.

"Well," broke in the boy, bluntly, "why not marry him, if she cared for him? I don't suppose you'll ask me to believe that Charley would have gone away if she hadn't refused him?"

"What a wily serpent it is!" said Mrs. Morris, smiling; "wanting to wring confidences from me whether I will or no."

"No. I'll be hanged if I *am* wily—am I, Clara?"

What Clara answered was not very distinct, for her face was partly covered with her handkerchief.

"There, you see Clara is rather an unhappy witness to call to character. You'd better come to me for a reputation," said Mrs. Morris, laughingly.

"It's no matter, I'm going away now," said he, sorrowfully.

"Going away—where?"

"Going back to England; they've sent a man to capture me, as if I was a wild beast, and he's there at the door now—precious impatient, too, I promise you, because I'm keeping the post-horses waiting."

"Oh, make him come in to luncheon. He's a gentleman—isn't he?"

"I should think he is! A great political swell, too, a something in the Admiralty, or the Colonies, or wherever it is."

"Well, just take Clara, and she'll find out May for you, and send your travelling companion into the garden here. I'll do the honours to him till lunch-time." And Mrs. Morris now turned into a shady walk, to think over what topics she should start for the amusement of the great official from Downing Street.

If we were going to tell tales of her—which we are not—we might reveal how it happened that she had seen a good

deal of such sort of people, at one era of her life, living in a Blue-Book atmosphere, and hearing much out of "Hansard." We merely mention the fact; as to the how, it is not necessary to refer to it. Not more are we bound to say why she did not retain for such high company what, in French, is called "the most distinguished consideration"—why, on the contrary, she thought and pronounced them the most insupportable of all bores. Our readers cannot fail to have remarked and appreciated the delicate reserve we have unvaryingly observed towards this lady—a respectful courtesy that no amount of our curiosity could endanger. Now, "charming women," of whom Mrs. M. was certainly one, have a great fondness for little occasional displays of their fascinations upon strangers. Whether it is that they are susceptible of those emotions of vanity that sway smaller natures, or whether it be merely to keep their fascinations from rusting by want of exercise, is hard to say, but so is the fact, and the enjoyment is all the higher when, by any knowledge of a speciality, they can astonish their chance acquaintance. For what Lord Agincourt had irreverently styled the "great political swell," she therefore prepared herself, with such memories as some years of life had stored for her. "He'll wonder," thought she, "where I came by all my Downing-Street slang. I'll certainly puzzle him with my cant of office." And so thinking, she walked briskly along in the clear frosty air over the crisped leaves that strewed the walk, till she beheld a person approaching from the extreme end of the alley.

The distance between them was yet considerable, and yet how was it that she seemed to falter in her steps, and suddenly, clasping her heart with both hands, appeared seized with a sort of convulsion? At the same instant she threw a terrified glance on every side, and looked like one prepared for sudden flight. To these emotions, more rapid in their course than it has taken time to describe them, succeeded a cold, determined calm, in which her features regained their usual expression, though marked by a paleness like death.

The stranger came slowly forward, examining the trees and flowers as he passed along, and peering with his double eye-glass to read the names attached to whatever was rarest. Affecting to be gathering flowers for a bouquet, she stooped frequently, till the other came near, and then, as he removed his hat to salute her, she threw back her veil and stood, silent, before him.

"Madam! madam!" cried he, in a voice of such intense

agony as showed that he was almost choked for utterance. "How is this, madam?" said he, in a tone of indignant demand. "How is this?"

"I have really no explanation to offer, sir," said she, in a cold, low voice. "My astonishment is great as your own; this meeting is not of my seeking. I need scarcely say so much."

"I do not know that!—by Heaven I do not!" cried he, in a passion.

"You are surely forgetting, sir, that we are no longer anything to each other, and thus forgetting the deference due to me as a stranger?"

"I neither forget nor forgive!" said he, sternly.

"Happily, sir, you will not be called upon to do either. I no longer bear your name——"

"Oh that you had never borne it!" cried he, in agony.

"There is at least one sentiment we agree in, sir—would that I never had!" said she, and a slight—very slight—tremor shook the words as she spoke them.

"Tell me at once, madam, what do you mean by this surprise? I know all your skill in *accidents*—what does this one portend?"

"You are too flattering, sir, believe me," said she, with an easy smile. "I have plotted nothing—I have nothing to plot—at least in which you are concerned. The unhappy bond that once united us is loosed for ever; but I do not see that even harsh memories are to suggest bad manners."

"I am no stranger to your flippancy, madam. You have made me acquainted with all your merits."

"You were going to say virtues, George—confess you were?" said she, coquettishly.

"Gracious mercy, woman! can you dare——"

"My dear Mr. Ogden," broke she in gently, "I can dare to be that which you have just told me was impossible for you—forgetful and forgiving."

"Oh, madam, this is indeed generous!" said he, with a bitter mockery.

"Well, sir, it were no bad thing if there were a little generosity between us. Don't fancy that all the forgiveness should come from *you;* don't imagine that *I* am not plaintiff as well as defendant." Then, suddenly changing her tone to one of easy indifference, she said, "And so your impression is, sir, that the Cabinet will undergo no change?"

She looked hurriedly round as she spoke, and saw Sir William Heathcote coming rapidly towards them.

"Sir William, let me present to you Mr. Ogden, a name you must be familiar with in the debates," said she, introducing them.

"I hope Lord Agincourt has not been correct in telling me that you are pressed for time, Mr. Ogden. I trust you will give us at least a day."

"Not an hour, not a minute, sir. I mean," added he, ashamed of his violence, "I have not an instant to spare."

"You'll scarcely profit by leaving us this morning," resumed Sir William. "The torrents between this and Massa are all full, and perfectly impassable."

"Pray accept Sir William's wise counsels, sir," said she, with the sweetest of all smiles.

A stern look, and a muttered something inaudible, was all his reply.

"What a dreary servitude must political life be, when one cannot bestow a passing hour upon society," said she, plaintively.

"Mr. Ogden could tell us that the rewards are worthy of the sacrifices," said Sir William, blandly.

"Are they better than the enjoyments of leisure, the delights of friendship, and the joys of home?" asked she, half earnestly.

"By Heaven, madam!" cried Ogden, and then stopped; when Sir William broke in,—

"Mrs. Morris is too severe upon public men. They are rarely called on to make such sacrifices as she speaks of."

While thus talking, they had reached the terrace in front of the house, where Agincourt was standing between May and Clara, holding a hand of each.

"Are you ready?" asked Ogden, abruptly.

"Ready; but very sorry to go," said the boy, bluntly.

"May we not offer you some luncheon, Mr. Ogden? You will surely take a glass of wine with us?"

"Nothing, sir, nothing. Nothing beneath the same roof with this woman," muttered he, below his breath; but her quick ears caught the words, and she whispered,—

"An unkind speech, George—most unkind!"

While Agincourt was taking his last affectionate farewells of the girls and Sir William, Mr. Ogden had entered the carriage, and thrown himself deeply back into a corner. Mrs. Morris, however, leaned over the door, and looked calmly, steadfastly at him.

"Won't you say good-bye?" said she, softly.

A look of insulting contempt was all his answer.

"Not one kind word at parting? Well, I am better than you; here's my hand." And she held out her fair and taper fingers towards him.

"Fiend—not woman!" was his muttered expression as he turned away.

"And a pleasant journey," said she, as if finishing a speech; while turning, she gave her hand to Agincourt: "Yes, to be sure, you may take a boy's privilege, and give me a kiss at parting," said she; while the youth, blushing a deep crimson, availed himself of the permission.

"There they go," said Sir William, as the horses rattled down the avenue; "and a finer boy and a grumpier companion it has rarely been my lot to meet with. A thousand pardons, my dear Mrs. Morris, if he is a friend of yours."

"I knew him formerly," said she, coldly. "I can't say I ever liked him."

"I remember his name," said Sir William, in a sort of hesitating way; "there was some story or other about him—either his wife ran away, or he eloped with somebody's wife."

"I'm sure it must have been the former," said Mrs. Morris, laughing. "Poor gentleman, he does not give one the impression of a Lothario. But whom have we here? The O'Shea, I declare! Look to your heart, May, dearest; take my word for it, he never turned out so smartly without dreams of conquest." Mr. O'Shea cantered up at the same moment, followed by Joe in a most accurate "get up" as groom, and dismounting, advanced, hat in hand, to salute the party.

There are blank days in this life of ours in which even a pleasant visitor is a bore—times in which dulness and seclusion are the best company, and it is anything but a boon to be broken in upon. It was the O'Shea's evil fortune to have fallen on one of these. It was in vain he recounted his club gossip about politics and party to Sir William—in vain he told Mrs. Morris the last touching episode of town scandal—in vain, even, did he present a fresh bouquet of lily-of-the-valley to May; each in turn passed him on to the other, till he found himself alone with Clara, who sat sorrowfully over the German lesson Layton was wont to help her with.

"What's the matter with you all?" cried he, half angrily, as he walked the room from end to end. "Has there any misfortune happened?"

"Charley has left us, Agincourt is just gone, the pleasant house is broken up; is not that enough to make us sad?" said she, sorrowfully.

"If you ever read Tommy Moore you'd know it was only another reason to make the most of the friends that were left behind," said he, adjusting his cravat at the glass, and giving himself a leer of knowing recognition. "That's the time of day, Clara!"

She looked at him, somewhat puzzled to know whether he had alluded to his sentiment, his whiskers, which he was now caressing, or the French clock on the mantelpiece.

"Is that one of Layton's?" said he, carelessly turning over a water-coloured sketch of a Lucchese landscape.

"Yes," said she, replacing it carefully in a portfolio.

"He won't do many more of them, I suspect."

"How so?—why?—what do you mean?" cried she, grasping his arm, while a death-like paleness spread over her features.

"Just that he's going as fast as he can. What's the mischief! is it fainting she is?"

With a low, weak sigh, the girl had relaxed her hold, and, staggering backwards, sunk senseless on the floor. O'Shea tugged violently at the bell: the servant rushed in, and immediately after Mrs. Morris herself; but by this time Clara had regained consciousness, and was able to utter a few words.

"I was telling her of Layton's being so ill," began he, in a whisper, to Mrs. Morris.

"Of course you were," said she, pettishly. "For an inconvenience, or an indiscretion, what can equal an Irishman?"

The speech was uttered as she led her daughter away, leaving the luckless O'Shea alone to ruminate over the politeness.

"There it is!" cried he, indignantly. "From the *Times*, down to the Widow Morris, it's the same story—the Irish! the Irish!—and it's no use fighting against it. Smash the Minister in Parliament, and you'll be told it was a speech more adapted to an Irish House of Commons; break the Sikh squares with the bayonet, and the cry is 'Tipperary tactics.' Isn't it a wonder how we bear it! I ask any man, did he ever hear of patience like ours?"

It was just as his indignation had reached this crisis that May Leslie hurriedly came into the room to search for a locket Clara had dropped when she fainted. While O'Shea assisted her in her search, he bethought whether the favourable moment had not arrived to venture on the great question of his own fate. It was true, he was still smarting under a national disparagement; but the sarcasm gave a sort of

reckless energy to his purpose, and he muttered, "Now, or never, for it!"

"I suppose it was a keepsake," said he, as he peered under the tables after the missing object.

"I believe so. At least, the poor child attaches great value to it."

"Oh dear!" sighed O'Shea. "If it was an old bodkin that was given me by one I loved, I'd go through fire and water to get possession of it."

"Indeed!" said she, smiling at the unwonted energy of the protestation.

"I would," repeated he, more solemnly. "It's not the value of the thing itself I'd ever think of. There's the ring was wore by my great-grandmother Ram, of Ram's Mountain, and though it's a rose-amethyst, worth three hundred guineas, it's only as a family token it has merit in my eyes."

Now this speech, discursive though it seemed, was artfully intended by the Honourable Member, for while incidentally throwing out claims to blood and an ancestry, it cunningly insinuated what logicians call the *à fortiori*—how the man who cared so much for his grandmother would necessarily adore his wife.

"We must give it up, I see," said May. "She has evidently not lost it here."

"And it was a heart, you say!" sighed the Member.

"Yes, a little golden heart with a ruby clasp."

"Oh dear! And to think that I've lost my own in the self-same spot."

"Yours! Why, had you a locket, too?"

"No, my angel!" cried he, passionately, as he clasped her hand, and fell on his knee before her, "but my heart—a heart that lies under your feet this minute! There, don't turn away—don't! May I never, if I know what's come over me these two months back! Night or day, it is the one image is always before me—one voice always in my ears."

"How tiresome that must be," said she, laughing merrily. "There, pray let go my hand; this is only folly, and not in very good taste, either."

"Folly, you call it? Love is madness, if you like. Out of this spot I'll never stir till I know my fate. Say the word, and I'm the happiest man or the most abject creature—— You're laughing again—I wonder how you can be so cruel!"

"Really, sir, if I regard your conduct as only absurd, it is a favourable view of it," said she, angrily.

"Do, darling of my soul! light of my eyes! loadstar of

my whole destiny!—do take a favourable view of it," said he, catching at her last words.

"I have certainly given you no pretence to make me ridiculous, sir," said she, indignantly.

"Ridiculous! ridiculous!" cried he, in utter amazement. "Sure it's my hand I'm offering you. What were you thinking of?"

"I believe I apprehend you aright, sir, and have only to say, that, however honoured by your proposal, it is one I must decline."

"Wouldn't you tell me why, darling? Wouldn't you say your reasons, my angel? Don't shake your head, my adored creature, but turn this way, and say, 'Gorman, your affection touches me: I see your love for me; but I'm afraid of you; you're light, and fickle, and inconstant; you're spoiled by flattery among the women, and deference and respect amongst the men. What can I hope from a nature so pampered?'"

"No, in good truth, Mr. O'Shea, not one of these objections have occurred to me; my answer was dictated by much narrower and more selfish considerations. At all events, sir, it is final; and I need only appeal to your sense of good-breeding never to resume a subject I have told you is distasteful to me." And with a heightened colour, and a glance which certainly betokened no softness, she turned away and left him.

"Distasteful! distasteful!" muttered he over her last words. "Women! women! women! there's no knowing ye—the devil a bit! What you'd like, and what you wouldn't, is as great a secret as the philosopher's stone! Heigho!" sighed he, as he opened his cravat, and drew in a long breath. "I didn't take a canter like that, these five years, and it has sent all the blood to my head. I hope she'll not mention it. I hope she won't tell it to the widow," muttered he, as he walked to the window for air. "*She's* the one would take her own fun out of it. Upon my conscience, this is mighty like apoplexy," said he, as, sitting down, he fanned himself with a book.

"Poor Mr. O'Shea!" said a soft voice; and, looking up, he saw Mrs. Morris, as, leaning over the back of his chair, she bent on him a look half quizzical and half compassionate. "Poor Mr. O'Shea!"

"Why so? How?" asked he, with an affected jocularity.

"Well," said she, with a faint sigh, "you're not the first man has drawn a blank in the lottery."

"I suppose not," muttered he, half sulkily.

"Nor will it prevent you trying your luck another time," said she, in the same tone.

"What did she say? How did she mention it?" whispered he, confidentially.

"She didn't believe you were serious at first; she thought it a jest. Why did you fall on your knees? it's never done now, except on the stage."

"How did *I* know that?" cried he, peevishly. "One ought to be proposing every day of the week to keep up with the fashions."

"If you had taken a chair at her side, a little behind hers, so as not to scrutinize her looks too closely, and stolen your hand gently forward, as if to touch the embroidery she was at work on, and then, at last, her hand, letting your voice grow lower and softer at each word, till the syllables would seem to drop, distilled from your heart——"

"The devil a bit of that I could do at all," cried he, impatiently. "If I can't make the game off the balls," said he, taking a metaphor from his billiard experiences, "I'm good for nothing. But will she come round? Do you think she'll change?"

"No; I'm afraid not," said she, shaking her head.

"Faix! she might do worse," said he, resolutely. "Do you know that she might do worse? If the mortgages was off, O'Shea-Ville is seventeen hundred a year; and, for family, we beat the county."

"I've no doubt of it," replied she, calmly.

"There was ancestors of mine hanged by Henry the Second, and one was strangled in prison two reigns before," said he, proudly. "The O'Sheas was shedding their blood for Ireland eight centuries ago! Did you ever hear of Mortagh Dhub O'Shea?"

"Never!" said she, mournfully.

"There it is," sighed he, drearily; "mushrooms is bigger, now-a-days, than oak-trees." And with this dreary reflection he arose and took his hat.

"Won't you dine here? I'm sure they expect you to stop for dinner," said she; but whether a certain devilry in her laughing eye made the speech seem insincere, or that his own distrust prompted it, he said,—

"No, I'll not stop; I couldn't eat a bit if I did."

"Come, come, you mustn't take it to heart in this way," said she, coaxingly.

"Do you think you could do anything for me?" said he, taking her hand in his; "for, to tell truth, it's my pride is

hurt. As we say in the House of Commons, now that my name is on the Bill, I'd like to carry it through. You understand that feeling?"

"Perhaps I do," said she, doubtfully, while, throwing herself into a chair, she leaned back, so as to display a little more than was absolutely and indispensably necessary of a beautifully rounded ankle and instep. Mr. O'Shea saw it, and marked it. There was no denying she was pretty—pretty, too, in those feminine and delicate graces which have special attractions for men somewhat hackneyed in life, and a "little shoulder-sore with the collar" of the world. As the Member gazed at the silky curls of her rich auburn hair, the long fringes that shadowed her fair cheeks, and the graceful lines of her beautiful figure, he gave a sigh—one of those a man inadvertently heaves when contemplating some rare object in a shop-window, which his means forbid him to purchase. It was only as he heaved a second and far deeper one, that she looked up, and with an arch drollery of expression all her own, said, as if answering him, "Yes, you are quite right; but you know you couldn't afford it."

"What do you mean—not afford what?" cried he, blushing deeply.

"Nor could *I* either," continued she, heedless of his interruption.

"Faith, then," cried he, with energy, "it was just what I was thinking of."

"But, after all," said she, gravely, "it wouldn't do; privateers must never sail in company. I believe there's nothing truer than that."

He continued to look at her, with a strange mixture of admiration and astonishment.

"And so," said she, rising, "let us part good friends, who may hope each to serve the other one of these days. Is that a bargain?" And she held out her hand.

"I swear to it!" cried he, pressing his lips to her fingers. "And now that you know my sentiments——"

"Hush!" cried she, with a gesture of warning, for she heard the voices of servants in the corridor. "Trust me; and good-bye!"

"One ought always to have an Irishman amongst one's admirers," said she, as, once more alone, she arranged her ringlets before the glass; "if there's any fighting to be done, he's sure not to fail you."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DAY IN EARLY SPRING.

That twilight of the year called spring, most delightful of all seasons, is scarcely known in Italy. Winter dies languidly away, and summer bursts forth at once, and in a few days the trees are clothed in full foliage, the tall grass is waving, and panting lizards sun themselves on the rocks over which so lately the mountain torrent was foaming. There are, however, a few days of transition, and these are inexpressibly delicious. The balmy air scented with the rose and the violet stirs gently through the olive-trees, shaking the golden limes amidst the dark leaves, and carrying away the sweet perfume on its breath; rivulets run bright and clear through rocky channels, mingling their murmurs with the early cicala. The acacia sheds its perfume on the breeze—a breeze so faint, as though it loved to linger on its way; and so, above, the lazy clouds hang upon the mountains, or float in fragments out to sea, as day wears on. What vitality there is in it all! —the rustling leaves, the falling water, the chirping birds, the softly plashing tide, all redolent of that happy season—the year's bright youth.

On such a day as this Alfred Layton strolled languidly through the grounds of Marlia. Three months of severe illness had worn him to a shadow, and he walked with the debility of one who had just escaped from a sick-room. The place was now deserted. The Heathcotes had gone to Rome for the winter, and the Villa was shut up and untenanted. It had been a cherished wish of poor Layton to visit the spot as soon as he could venture abroad; and Quackinboss, the faithful friend who had nursed him through his whole illness, had that day yielded to his persuasion and brought him there.

Who could have recognized the young and handsome youth in the broken-down, feeble, careworn man who now leaned over the palings of a little flower-garden, and gazed mournfully at a rustic bench beneath a lime-tree? Ay, there it was, in that very spot, one chapter of his life was finished. It was

there she had refused him! He had no right, it is true, to have presumed so highly; there was nothing in his position to warrant such daring; but had she not encouraged him? That was the question; he believed so, at least. She had seen his devotion to her, and had not repulsed it. Nay, more, she had suffered him to speak to her of feelings and emotions, of hopes, and fears, and ambitions, that only they are led to speak who talk to willing ears. Was this encouragement, or was it the compassionate pity of one, to him, so friendless and alone? May certainly knew that he loved her. She had even resented his little passing attentions to Mrs. Morris, and was actually jealous of the hours he bestowed on Clara; and yet, with all this, she had refused him, and told him not to hope that, even with time, her feeling towards him should change. "How could it be otherwise?" cried he to himself. "What was I, to have pretended so highly? Her husband should be able to offer a station superior to her own. So thought she, too, herself. How her words ring in my ears even yet: 'I *do* love rank!' Yes, it was there, on that spot, she said it. I made confession of my love, and she, in turn, told me of *hers;* and it was the world, the great and gorgeous prize, for which men barter everything. And then her cold smile, as I said, 'What is this same rank you prize so highly; can I not reach it—win it?' 'I will not waste youth in struggle and conflict,' said she. 'Ha!' cried I, 'these words are not yours. I heard them one short week ago. I know your teacher now. It was that false-hearted woman gave you these precious maxims. It was not thus you spoke or felt when first I knew you, May.' 'Is it not well,' said she, 'that we have each grown wiser?' I heard no more. I have no memory for the passionate words I uttered, the bitter reproaches I dared to make her. We parted in anger, never to meet again; and then poor Clara, how I hear her faint, soft voice, as she found me sitting there alone, forsaken, as she asked me, 'May I take these flowers?' and oh! how bitterly she wept as I snatched them from her hand, and scattered them on the ground, saying, 'They were not meant for you!' 'Let me have one, dear Alfred,' said she, just then; and she took up a little jasmine flower from the walk. 'Even that you despise to give is dear to *me!* And so I kissed her on the forehead, and said, 'Good-bye.' Two partings—never to meet again!" He covered his face with his hands, and his chest heaved heavily.

"It's main dreary in these diggin's here," cried Quackinboss, as he came up with long strides. "I've been a-lookin'

about on every side to find some one to open the house for us, but there ain't a crittur to be found. What's all this about? You haven't been a-cryin', have you?"

Alfred turned away his head without speaking.

"I'll tell you what it is, Layton," said he, earnestly, "there's no manner of misfortune can befall in life that one need to fret over, but the death of friends, or sickness; and, as these are God's own doin', it is not for us to say they're wrong. Cheer up, man; you and I are a-goin' to fight the world together."

"You have been a true friend to *me*," said Layton, grasping the other's hand, while he held his head still averted.

"Well, I mean to, that's a fact; but you must rouse yourself, lad. We're a-goin' 'cross seas, and amongst fellows that, whatever they do with their spare time, give none of it to grief. Whoever saw John C. Colhoun cry? Did any one ever catch Dan Webster in tears?"

"I wasn't crying," said Layton; "I was only saddened to see again a spot where I used to be so happy. I was thinking of bygones."

"I take it bygones is very little use if they don't teach us something more than to grieve over 'em; and, what's more, Layton—it sounds harsh to say it—but grief, when it's long persisted in, is downright selfishness, and nothing else."

Layton slipped his arm within the other's to move away, but as he did so he turned one last look towards the little garden.

"I see it all now," said Quackinboss, as they walked along; "you've been and met a sweetheart down here once on a time, that's it. She's been what they call cruel, or she's broke her word to you. Well, I don't suppose there's one man livin'—of what might be called real men—as hasn't had something of the same experience. Some has it early, some late, but it's like the measles, it pushes you main hard if you don't take it when you're young. There's no bending an old bough—you must break it."

There was a deep tone of melancholy in the way the last words were uttered that made Layton feel his companion was speaking from the heart.

"But it's all our own fault," broke in Quackinboss, quickly; "it all comes of the way we treat 'em."

"How do you mean?" asked Layton, eagerly.

"I mean," said the other, resolutely, "we treat 'em as reasonable beings, and they ain't. No, sir, women is like Red-men; they ain't to be persuaded, or argued with; they're

to be told what is right for 'em, and good for 'em, and that's all. What does all your courting and coaxing a gal, but make her think herself something better than all creation? Why, you keep a-tellin' her so all day, and she begins to believe it at last. Now, how much better and fairer to say to her, 'Here's how it is, miss, you've got to marry me, that's how it's fixed.' She'll understand that."

"But if she says, 'No, I won't'?"

"No, no," said Quackinboss, with a half-bitter smile, "she'll never say that to the man as knows how to tell her his mind. And as for that courtship, it's all a mistake. Why, women won't confess they like a man, just to keep the game a-movin'. I'm blest if they don't like it better than marriage."

Layton gave a faint smile, but, faint as it was, Quackinboss perceived it, and said,—

"Now, don't you go a-persuadin' yourself these are all Yankee notions, and such-like. I'm a-talkin' of human natur', and there ain't many as knows more of that article than Leonidas Shaver Quackinboss. All you Old-World folk make one great mistake, and nothing shows so clearly as how you're a worn-out race, used up and done for. You live too much with your emotions and your feelin's. Have you never remarked that when the tap-root of a tree strikes down too far it gets into a cold soil? And from that day for'ard you'll never see fruit or blossom more. That's just the very thing you're a-doin'. You ain't satisfied to be active, and thrivin', and healthful, but you must go a-speculatin' about why you are this, and why you ain't t'other. Get work to do, sir, and do it."

"It is what I intend," said Layton, in a low voice.

"There ain't nothing like labour," said Quackinboss, with energy; "work keeps the devil out of a man's mind, for, somehow, there's nothing that black fellow loves like loafing. And, whenever I see a great, tall, well-whiskered chap leaning over a balcony in a grand silk dressing-gown, with a gold stitched cap on his head, and he a-yawning, I say to myself, 'Maybe I don't know *who*'s at your elbow now;' and when I see one of our strapping Western fellows, as he has given the last stroke of his hatchet to a pine-tree, and stands back to let it fall, wiping the honest sweat from his brow, as his eyes turn upward over the tree-tops to something higher than them, I say to my heart, 'All right, there; he knows who it was gave him the strength to lay that sixty-foot stem so low.'"

"You say truly," muttered Layton.

"I know it, sir; I've been a-loafing myself these last three years, and I've run more to seed in that time than in all my precious life; but I mean to give it up."

"What are your plans?" asked Layton, not sorry to let the conversation turn away from himself and his own affairs.

"My plans! They are ours, I hope," said Quackinboss. "You're a-coming out with me to the States, sir. We fixed it all t'other night, I reckon! I'm a-goin' to make your fortune; or, better still, to show you how to make it for yourself."

Layton walked on in moody silence, while Quackinboss, with all the zealous warmth of conviction, described the triumphs and success he was to achieve in the New World.

A very few words will suffice to inform our reader of all that he need know on this subject. During Layton's long convalescence, poor Quackinboss felt his companionable qualities sorely taxed. At first, indeed, his task was that of consoler, for he had to communicate the death of Alfred's mother, which occurred in the early days of her son's illness. The Rector's letter, in conveying the sad tidings, was everything that kindness and delicacy could dictate, and, with scarcely a reference to his own share in the benevolence, showed that all care and attention had waited upon her last hours. The blow, however, was almost fatal to Layton; and the thought of that forlorn, deserted death-bed clung to him by day, and filled his dreams by night.

Quackinboss did his utmost, not very skilfully nor very adroitly, perhaps, but with a hearty sincerity, to combat this depression. He tried to picture a future of activity and exertion—a life of sterling labour. He placed before his companion's eyes the objects and ambitions men usually deem the worthiest, and endeavoured to give them an interest to him. Met in all his attempts by a dreary, hopeless indifference, the kind-hearted fellow reflected long and deeply over his next resource; and so one day, when Layton's recovered strength suggested a hope for the project, he gave an account of his own neglected youth, how, thrown when a mere boy upon the world, he had never been able to acquire more than a smattering of what others learn at school. "I had three books in the world, sir—a Bible, Robinson Crusoe, and an old volume of Wheatson's Algebra. And from a-readin' and readin' of 'em over and over, I grew to blend 'em all up in my head together. And there was Friday, just as much a reality to me as Father Abraham; and I

thought men kept all their trade reckoning by simple equations. I felt, in fact, as if there was no more than these three books in all creation, and out of them a man had to pick all the wisdom he could. Now, what I'm a-thinkin' is, that though I'm too old to go to school, maybe as how you'd not refuse to give me a helpin' hand, by readin' occasionally out of those languages I only know by name? Teachin' an old fellow like *me* is well-nigh out of the question; but when a man has got a long, hard-earned experience of human natur', it's a main pleasant thing to know that oftentimes the thoughts that he is struggling with have occurred to great minds, who know how to utter them; and so many an impression comes to be corrected, or mayhap confirmed, by those clever fellows, with their thoughtful heads."

There was one feature in the project which could not but gratify Layton; it enabled him to show his gratitude for the brotherly affection he had met with, and he accepted the suggestion at once. The first gleam of animation that had lighted his eyes for many a day was when planning out the line of reading he intended them to follow. Taking less eras of history than some of the great men who had illustrated them, he thought how such characters would be sure to interest one whose views of life were eminently practical, and so a great law-giver, a legislator, a great general, or orator, was each evening selected for their reading. If it were not out of our track, we might tell here how much Layton was amused by the strange, shrewd commentaries of his companion on the characters of a classic age; or how he enjoyed the curious resemblances Quackinboss would discover between the celebrities of Athens and Rome and the great men of his own country. And many a time was the reader interrupted by such exclamations as, "Ay, sir, just what J. Q. Adams would have said!" or, "That's the way our John Randolph would have fixed it!"

But Quackinboss was not satisfied with the pleasure thus afforded to himself, for, with native instinct, he began to think how all such stories of knowledge and amusement might be utilized for the benefit of the possessor.

"You must come to the States, Layton," he would say. "You must let our people hear these things. They're a main sharp, wide-awake folk, but they ain't posted up about Greeks and Romans. Just mind me, now, and you'll do a fine stroke of work, sir. Give them one of these pleasant stories out of that fellow there, Herod—Herod—what d'ye call him?"

"Herodotus?"

"Ay, that's he; and then a slice out of one of those slapping speeches you read to me t'other night. I'm blessed if the fellow didn't lay it on like Point Dexter himself; and wind up all, with what we can't match, a comic scene from Aristophanes. You see I have his name all correct. I ain't christened Shaver if you don't fill your hat with Yankee dollars in every second town of the Union."

Layton burst out into a hearty laugh at what seemed to him a project so absurd and impossible; but Quackinboss, with increased gravity, continued,—

"Your British pride, mayhap, is offended by the thought of lecturin' to us Western folk; but I am here to tell you, sir, that our own first men—ay, and you'll not disparage *them* —are a-doin' it every day. It's not play-actin' I'm speaking of. They don't go before a crowded theatre to play mimic with face, or look, or voice, or gesture. They've got a something to tell folk that's either ennobling or instructive. They've got a story of some man, who, without one jot more of natural advantages than any of those listening there, made himself a name to be blessed and remembered for ages. They've to show what a thing a strong will is when united with an honest heart; and how no man, no matter how humble he be, need despair of being useful to his fellows. They've got many a lesson out of history to give a people who are just as ambitious, just as encroaching, and twice as warlike as the Athenians, about not neglecting private morality in the search after national greatness. What is the lecturer but the pioneer to the preacher? In clearing away ignorance and superstition, ain't he making way for the army of truth that's coming up? Now I tell you, sir, that ain't a thing to be ashamed of!"

Layton was silent; not convinced, it is true, but restrained, from respect for the other's ardour, from venturing on a reply too lightly. Quackinboss, after a brief pause, went on:

"Well, it is possible what I said about the profit riled you. Well, then, don't take the dollars; or take them, and give them, as some of our Western men do, to some object of public good—if you're rich enough."

"Rich enough! I'm a beggar," broke in Layton, bitterly. "I'm at this instant indebted to you for more than, perhaps, years of labour may enable me to repay."

"I put it all down in a book, sir," said Quackinboss, sternly, "and I threw it in the fire the first night you read

out Homer to me. I said to myself, 'You are well paid, Shaver, old fellow. You never knew how your heart could be shaken that way, and what brave feelings were lying there still, inside of it.'"

"Nay, dear friend, it is not thus I'm to acquit my debt. Even the moneyed one——"

"I tell you what, Layton," said Quackinboss, rising, and striking the table with his clenched fist, "there's only one earthly way to part us, and that is by speaking to me of this. Once, and for ever, I say to you, there's more benefit to a man like *me* to be your companion for a week, than for *you* to have toiled, and fevered, and sweated after gold, as I have done for thirty hard years."

"Give me a day or two to think over it," said Layton, "and I'll tell you my resolve."

"With all my heart! Only, I would ask you not to take my showing of its goodness, but to reason the thing well out of your own clear head. Many a just cause is lost by a bad lawyer; remember that." And thus the discussion ended for the time.

The following morning, when they met at breakfast, Layton took the other's hand, and said,—

"I've thought all night of what you've said, and I accept —not without many a misgiving as regards myself, but I accept."

"I'd not take ten thousand dollars for the engagement, sir," said Quackinboss, as he wrung Layton's hand. "No, sir, I'd not take it, for even four cities of the Union."

Although thus the project was ratified between them, scarcely a day passed that Layton did not experience some compunction for his pledge. Now, it was a repugnance to the sort of enterprise he was about to engage in, the criticisms to which he was to expose himself, and the publicity he was to confront; nor could all his companion's sanguine assurances of success compensate him for his own heartfelt repugnance to try the ordeal.

"After all," thought he, "failure, with all its pangs of wounded self-love, will only serve to show Quackinboss how deeply I feel myself his debtor when I am content to risk so much to repay him."

Such was the bond he had signed, such his struggles to fulfil its obligations. One only condition he stipulated for— he wished to go to Ireland before setting out for the States, to see the last resting-place of his poor mother ere he quitted his country, perhaps for ever. Doctor Millar, too, had men-

tioned that a number of letters were amongst the few relics she had left, and he desired, for many reasons, that these should not fall into strangers' hands. As for Quackinboss, he agreed to everything. Indeed, he thought that as there was no use in reaching the States before "the fall," they could not do better than ramble about Ireland, while making some sort of preparation for the coming campaign.

"How sad this place makes me!" said Layton, as they strolled along one of the leaf-strewn alleys. "I wish I had not come here."

"That's just what I was a-thinkin' myself," said the other. "I remember coming back all alone once over the Michigan prairie, which I had travelled about eight months before with a set of hearty companions, and whenever I'd come up to one of the spots where our tent used to be pitched, and could mark the place by the circle of greener grass, with a burnt-up patch where the fire stood, it was all I could do not to burst out a-cryin' like a child! It's a main cruel thing to go back alone to where you've once been happy in, and there's no forgettin' the misery of it ever after."

"That's true," said Layton; "the pleasant memories are erased for ever. Let us go."

CHAPTER XXV.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

It is amongst the prerogatives of an author to inform his reader of many things which go on "behind the scenes" of life. Let me therefore ask your company, for a brief space, in a small, and not ill-furnished chamber, which, deep in the recesses of back scenes, dressing-rooms, scaffolding, and machinery, is significantly entitled, by a painted inscription, "Manager's Room." Though the theatre is a London one, the house is small. It is one of those West-end speculations which are occasionally graced by a company of French comedians, a monologist, or a conjuror. There is all the usual splendour before the curtain, and all the customary squalor behind. At the present moment—for it is growing duskish of a November day, and rehearsal is just over—the general aspect of the place is dreary enough. The box fronts and the lustre are cased in brown holland, and, though the curtain is up, the stage presents nothing but a chaotic mass of dis-disjointed scenery and properties. Tables, chairs, musical instruments, the half of a boat, a throne, and a guillotine, lie littered about, amidst which a ragged supernumerary wanders, broom in hand, but apparently hopeless of where or how to begin to reduce the confusion to order.

The manager's room is somewhat more habitable, for there is a good carpet, warm curtains, and an excellent fire, at which two gentlemen are seated, whose jocund tones and pleasant faces are certainly, so far as outward signs go, fair guarantees that the world is not dealing very hardly with them, nor they themselves much disgusted with the same world. One of these—the elder, a middle-aged man somewhat inclined to corpulency, with a florid cheek, and clear, dark eye—is the celebrated Mr. Hyman Stocmar; celebrated, I say, for who can take up the morning papers without reading his name and knowing his whereabouts; as thus:—"We are happy to be able to inform our readers that Mr. Stocmar is perfectly satisfied with his after season at the 'Regent's.' Whatever other managers may say, Mr. Stocmar can make no complaint of courtly indifference. Her Majesty has four times within the last month graced his

theatre with her presence. Mr. Stocmar is at Madrid, at Vienna, at Naples. Mr. Stocmar is in treaty with Signor Urlaccio of Turin, or Mademoiselle Voltarina of Venice. He has engaged the Lapland voyagers, sledge-dogs and all, the Choctaw chiefs, or the Californian lecturer, Boreham, for the coming winter. Let none complain of London in November so long as Mr. Hyman Stocmar caters for the public taste;" and so on. To look at Stocmar's bright complexion, his ruddy glow, his well-filled waistcoat, and his glossy ringlets —for, though verging on forty, he has them still "curly" —you'd scarcely imagine it possible that his life was passed amongst more toil, confusion, difficulty, and distraction, than would suffice to kill five out of any twenty, and render the other fifteen deranged. I do not mean alone the worries inseparable from a theatrical direction—the fights, the squabbles, the insufferable pretensions he must bear, the rivalries he must reconcile, the hates he must conciliate,—the terrible existence of coax and bully, bully and coax, fawn, flatter, trample on, and outrage, which goes on night and day behind the curtain—but that his whole life in the world is exactly a mild counterpart of the same terrible performance; the great people, his patrons, being fifty times more difficult to deal with than the whole corps itself—the dictating dowagers and exacting lords, the great man who insists upon Mademoiselle So-and-so being engaged, the great lady who will have no other box than that occupied by the Russian embassy, the friends of this tenor and the partisans of that, the classic admirers of grand music, and that larger section who will have nothing but comic opera, not to mention the very extreme parties who only care for the ballet, and those who vote the "Traviata" an unclean thing. What are a lover's perjuries to the lies such a man tells all day long?—lies only to be reckoned by that machine that records the revolutions of a screw in a steamer. His whole existence is passed in promises, excuses, evasions, and explanations; always paying a small dividend to truth, he barely escapes utter bankruptcy, and by a plausibility most difficult to distrust, he obtains a kind of half-credit—that of one who would keep his word if he could.

By some strange law of compensation, this man, who sees a very dark side of human nature—sees it in its low intrigues, unworthy pursuits, falsehoods and depravities—who sees even the "great" in their moods of meanness—this man, I say, has the very keenest relish for life, and especially the life of London. He knows every capital of Europe: Paris,

from the Chaussée d'Antin to the Boulevard Mont-Parnasse; Vienna, from the Hof to the Volksgarten; Rome, from the Piazza di Spagna to the Ghetto; and yet he would tell you they are nothing, all of them, to that area between Pall Mall and the upper gate of Hyde Park. He loves his clubs, his dinners, his junketings to Richmond or Greenwich, his short Sunday excursions to the country, generally to some great artiste's villa near Fulham or Chiswick, and declares to you that it is England alone offers all these in perfection. Is it any explanation? does it give any clue to this gentleman's nature, if I say that a certain aquiline character in his nose, and a peculiar dull lustre in the eye, recall that race who, with all the odds of a great majority against them, enjoy a marvellous share of this world's prosperity? Opposite to him sits one not unworthy—even from externals—of his companionship. He is a very good-looking fellow, with light brown hair, his beard and moustaches being matchless in tint and arrangement; he has got large, full blue eyes, a wide capacious forehead, and that style of head, both in shape and the way in which it is set on, which indicate a frank, open, and courageous nature. Were it not for a little over-attention to dress, there is no "snobbery" about him; but there is a little too much velvet on his paletot, and his watch trinkets are somewhat in excess, not to say that the gold head of his cane is ostentatiously large and striking. This is Captain Ludlow Paten, a man about town, known to and by everybody, very much asked about in men's circles, but never by any accident met in ladies' society. By very young men he is eagerly sought after. It is one of the best things coming of age has in its gift is to know Paten and be able to ask him to dine. Older ones relish him full as much; but his great popularity is with a generation beyond that again: the mediævals, who walk massively and ride not at all; the florid, full-cheeked, slightly bald generation, who grace club windows of a morning and the coulisses at night. These are his "set" *par excellence*, and he knows them thoroughly. As for himself, or his family, no one knows, nor indeed wants to know, anything. The men he associates with chiefly in life are all "cognate numbers," and these are the very people who never trouble their heads about a chance intruder amongst them; and, although some rumour ran that his father was a porter at the Home Office, or a tailor at Blackwall, none care a jot on the matter: they want him; and he couldn't be a whit more useful if his veins ran with all the blood of all the Howards.

There is a story of him, however, which, though I reveal to you, is not generally known. He was once tried for a murder. It was a case of poisoning in Jersey, where the victim was a well-known man of the Turf, and who was murdered by the party he had invited to spend a Christmas with him. Paten was one of the company, and included in the accusation. Two were hanged; Paten and another, named Collier, acquitted. Paten's name was Hunt, but he changed it at once, and, going abroad, entered the Austrian service, where, in eight years, he became a lieutenant. This was enough for probation and rank, and so he returned to England as Captain Ludlow Paten. Stocmar, of course, knew the story; there were half a dozen more, also, who did, but they each and all knew that poor Paul was innocent—that there wasn't a fragment of evidence against him—that he lost—actually lost—by Hawke's death; that he was carried tipsy to bed that night two hours before the murder; that he was so overcome the next morning by his debauch that he was with difficulty awakened; that the coroner thought him a downright fool, he was so stunned by the event; in a word, though he changed his name to Paten, and now wore a tremendous beard, and affected a slightly foreign accent, these were disguises offered up to the mean prejudices of the world rather than precautions of common safety and security.

Though thus Paten's friends had passed this bill of indemnity in his favour, the affair of Jersey was never alluded to, by even his most intimate amongst them. It was a page of history to be carefully wafered up till that reckoning when all volumes are ransacked, and no blottings nor erasures avail! As for himself, who, to look at him, with his bright countenance, to hear the jocund ring of his merry laugh—who could ever imagine such a figure in a terrible scene of tragedy? What could such a man have to do with any of the dark machinations of crime, the death-struggle, the sack, the silent party that stole across the grass at midnight, and the fish-pond? Oh no! rather picture him as one who, meeting such details in his daily paper, would hastily turn the sheet to seek for pleasanter matter; and so it was he eschewed these themes in conversation, and even when some celebrated trial would for the moment absorb all interest, giving but one topic in almost every circle, Paten would drop such commonplaces on the subject as showed he cared little or nothing for the event.

Let us now hear what these two men are talking about, as

they sat thus confidentially over the fire. Stocmar is the chief speaker. He does not smoke of a morning, because many of his grand acquaintances are averse to tobacco; as for Paten, the cigar never leaves his lips.

"Well, now for his story!" cried Paten. "I'm anxious to hear about him."

"I'm sorry I can't gratify the curiosity. All I can tell you is where I found him. It was in Dublin. They had a sort of humble Cremorne there—a place little resorted to by the better classes; indeed, rarely visited save by young subs from the garrison, milliners, and such other lost sheep; not very wonderful, after all, seeing that the rain usually contrived to extinguish the fireworks. Having a spare evening on my hands, I went there, and, to my astonishment, witnessed some of the most extraordinary displays in fireworks I had ever seen. Whether for beauty of design, colour and precision, I might declare them unequalled. 'Who's your pyrotechnist?' said I to Barry, the proprietor.

"'I can't spare him, Mr. Stocmar,' said he, 'so I entreat you don't carry him off from me.'

"'Oh!' cried I, 'it was mere curiosity prompted the question. The man is well enough here, but he wouldn't do for us. We have got Giomelli, and Clari——'

"'Not fit to light a squib for him,' said he, warming up in his enthusiasm for his man. 'I tell you, sir, that fellow would teach Giomelli, and every Italian of them all. He's a great man, sir—a genius. He was, once on a time, the great Professor of a University; one of the very first scientific men of the kingdom, and if it wasn't for'—here he made a sign of drinking—'he'd perhaps be this day sought by the best in the land.'

"Though interested by all this, I only gave a sort of incredulous laugh in return, when he went on:

"'If I was quite sure you'd not take him away—if you'd give me your word of honour for it—I'd just show him to you, and you'd see—even tipsy as he's sure to be—if I'm exaggerating.'

"'What is he worth to you, Barry?' said I.

"'He's worth—not to reckon private engagements for fireworks in gentlemen's grounds, and the like—he's worth from seven to eight pounds a week."

"'And you give him——?'

"'Well, I don't give him much. It wouldn't do to give him much; he has no self-control—no restraint. He'd kill himself—actually kill himself.'

"'So that you only give him——?'

"'Fourteen shillings a week. Not but that I am making a little fund for him, and occasionally remitted his wife—he had a wife—a pound or so, without his knowledge.'

"'Well, he's not too dear at that,' said I. 'Now let me see and speak with him, Barry, and if I like him, you shall have a fifty-pound note for him. You know well enough that I needn't pay a sixpence. I have fellows in my employment would track him out if you were to hide him in one of his rocket-canisters; so just be reasonable, and take a good offer.'

"He was not very willing at first, but he yielded after a while, and so I became the owner of the Professor, for such they called him."

"Had he no other name?"

"Yes; an old parrot, that he had as a pet, called him Tom, and so we accepted that name; and as Tom, or Professor Tom, he is now known amongst us."

"Did you find, after all, that you made a good bargain?"

"I never concluded a better, though it has its difficulties; for, as the Professor is almost an idiot when perfectly sober, and totally insensible when downright drunk, there is just a short twilight interval between the two, when his faculties are in good order."

"What can he do at this favourable juncture?"

"What can he not? is the question. Why, it was he arranged all the scores for the orchestra after the fire, when we had not a scrap left of the music of the 'Maid of Cashmere.' It was he invented that sunrise, in the last scene of all, with the clouds rolling down the mountains, and all the rivulets glittering as the first rays touch them. It was he wrote the third act of Linton's new comedy—the catastrophe and all were his. It was he dashed off that splendid critique on Ristori, that set the town in a blaze; and then he went home and wrote the parody on 'Myrra' for the Strand, all the same night, for I had watered the brandy, and kept him in the second stage of delirium till morning."

"What a chance! By Jove! Stocmar, you are the only fellow ever picks up a gem of this water!"

"It's not every man can tell the stone that will pay for the cutting, Paten, remember that. I've had to buy this experience of mine dearly enough."

"Are you not afraid that the others will hear of him, and seduce him by some tempting offer?"

"I have, in a measure, provided against that contin-

gency. He lives here, in a small crib, where we once kept a brown bear; and he never ventures abroad, so that the chances are he will not be discovered."

"How I should like to have a look at him."

"Nothing easier. Let us see, what o'clock is it? Near five. Well, this is not an unfavourable moment; he has just finished his dinner, and not yet begun the evening." Ringing the bell as he spoke, he gave orders to a supernumerary to send the Professor to him.

While they waited for his coming, Stocmar continued to give some further account of his life and habits, the total estrangement from all companionship in which he lived, his dislike to be addressed, and the seeming misanthropy that animated him. At last the manager, getting impatient, rang once more, to ask if he were about to appear.

"Well, sir," said the man, with a sort of unwillingness in his manner, "he said as much as that he wasn't coming; that he had just dined, and meant to enjoy himself without business for a while."

"Go back and tell him that Mr. Stocmar has something very important to tell him; that five minutes will be enough. —You see the stuff he's made of?" said the manager, as the man left the room.

Another, and nearly as long a delay ensued, and at last the dragging sound of heavy slipshod feet was heard approaching; the door was rudely opened, and a tall old man, of haggard appearance and in the meanest rags, entered, and, drawing himself proudly up, stared steadfastly at Stocmar, without even for an instant noticing the presence of the other.

"I wanted a word, just one word with you, Professor," began the manager, in an easy, familiar tone.

"Men do not whistle even for a dog, when he's at his meals," said the old man, insolently. "They told you I was at my dinner, didn't they?"

"Sorry to disturb you, Tom; but, as two minutes would suffice for all I had to say——"

"Reason the more to keep it for another occasion," was the stubborn reply.

"We are too late this time," whispered Stocmar across towards Paten; "the fellow has been at the whisky-bottle already."

With that marvellous acuteness of hearing that a brain in its initial state of excitement is occasionally gifted with, the old man caught the words, and, as suddenly rendered aware of

the presence of a third party, turned his eyes on Paten. At first the look was a mere stare, but gradually the expression grew more fixed, and the bleared eyes dilated, while his whole features became intensely eager. With a shuffling but hurried step he then moved across the floor, and coming close up to where Paten stood, he laid his hands upon his shoulders, and wheeled him rudely round, till the light of the window fell full upon him.

"Well, old gent," said Paten, laughing, "if we are not old friends, you treat me very much as though we were."

A strange convulsion, half smile, half grin, passed over the old man's face, but he never uttered a word, but stood gazing steadily on the other.

"You are forgetting yourself, Tom," said Stocmar, angrily. "That gentleman is not an acquaintance of yours."

"And who told *you* that?" said the old man, insolently. "Ask himself if we are not."

"I'm afraid I must give it against you, old boy," said Paten, good-humouredly. "This is the first time I have had the honour to meet you."

"It is not!" said the old man, with a solemn and even haughty emphasis.

"I could scarcely have forgotten a man of such impressive manners," said Paten. "Will you kindly remind me of the where and how you imagine us to have met?"

"I will," said the other, sternly. "You shall hear the where and the how. The where was in the High Court, at Jersey, on the 18th of January, in the year 18—; the the how, was my being called on to prove the death, by corrosive sublimate, of Godfrey Hawke. Now, sir, what say you to my memory—is it accurate, or not?"

Had not Paten caught hold of a heavy chair, he would have fallen; even as it was, he swayed forward and backward like a drunken man.

"And you—you were a doctor in those days, it seems," said he, with an affected laugh, that made his ghastly features appear almost horrible.

"Yes; they accused *me* of curing folk, just as they charged *you* with killing them. Calumnious world that it is—lets no man escape!"

"After all, my worthy friend," said Paten, as he drew himself haughtily up, and assumed, though by a great effort, his wonted ease of manner, "you are deceived by some chance resemblance, for I know nothing about Jersey,

and just as little of that interesting little incident you have alluded to."

"This is even more than you attempted on the trial. You never dreamed of so bold a stroke as that, there. No, no, Paul Hunt, I know you well: that's a gift of mine—drunk or sober it has stuck to me through life—I never forget a face—never!"

"Come, come, old Tom," said Stocmar, as he drew forth a sherry decanter and a large glass from a small recess in the wall, "this is not the kindliest way to welcome an old friend or make a new one. Taste this sherry, and take the bottle back with you, if you like the flavour." Stocmar's keen glance met Paten's eyes, and as quickly the other understood his tactique.

"Good wine, rare wine, if it wasn't so cold on the stomach," said the old man, as he tossed off the second goblet. Already his eyes grew wild and bloodshot, and his watery lip trembled. "To your good health, gentlemen both," said he, as he finished the decanter. "I'm proud you liked that last scene. It will be finer before I've done with it; for I intend to make the lava course down the mountain, and be seen fitfully as the red glow of the eruption lights up the picture."

"With the bay and the fleet all seen in the distance, Tom," broke in Stocmar.

"Just so, sir; the lurid glare—as the newspaper fellows will call it—over all. Nothing like Bengal-lights and Roman-candles; they are the poetry of the modern drama. Ah! sir, no sentiment without nitrate of potash; no poetry if you haven't phosphorus." And with a drunken laugh, and a leer of utter vacancy, the old man reeled from the room and sought his den again.

"Good Heavens, Stocmar! what a misfortune!" cried Paten, as, sick with terror, he dropped down into a chair.

"Never fret about it, Paul. That fellow will know nothing of what has passed when he wakes to-morrow. His next drunken bout—and I'll take care it shall be a deep one—will let such a flood of Lethe over his brain, that not one single recollection will survive the deluge. You saw why I produced the decanter?"

"Yes; it was cleverly done, and it worked like magic. But only think, Stocmar, if any one had chanced to be here — it was pure chance that there was not — and then——"

"Egad! it might have been as you say," said Stocmar; "there would have been no stopping the old fellow; and had he but got the very slightest encouragement, he had been off at score."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DARK REMEMBRANCE.

On a sea like glass, and with a faint moonlight streaking the calm water, the *Vivid*, her Majesty's mail packet, steamed away for Ostend. There were very few passengers aboard, so that it was clearly from choice two tall men, wrapped well up in comfortable travelling-cloaks, continued to walk the deck, till the sandy headlands of Belgium could be dimly descried through the pinkish grey of the morning. They smoked and conversed as they paced up and down, talking in low, cautious tones, and even entirely ceasing to speak when by any chance a passing sailor came within earshot.

"It is, almost day for day, nine years since I crossed over here," said one, "and certainly a bleaker future never lay before any man than on that morning!"

"Was *she* with you, Ludlow?" asked the other, whose deep voice recalled the great Mr. Stocmar. "Was *she* with you?"

"No; she refused to come. There was nothing I didn't do, or threaten to do, but in vain. I menaced her with every sort of publicity and exposure. I swore I'd write the whole story—giving a likeness of her from the miniature in my possession. That I'd give her letters to the world in fac-simile of her own hand; and that, while the town rang with the tragedy, as the newspapers called it, they should have a dash of melodrama, or high comedy too, to heighten the interest. All in vain; she braved everything—defied everything."

"There are women with that sort of masculine temperament——"

"Masculine you call it!" cried the other, scoffingly; "you never made such a blunder in your life. They are entirely and essentially womanly. You'd break twenty men down,

smash them like rotten twigs, before you'd succeed in turning one woman of this stamp from her fixed will. I'll tell you another thing, too, Stocmar," added he, in a lower voice: "they do not fear the world the way men do. Would you believe it? Collins and myself left the island in a fishing-boat, and she—the woman—went coolly on board the mail packet with her maid and child, and sat down to breakfast with the passengers, one of whom had actually served on the jury.

"What pluck! I call that pluck."

"It's more like madness than real courage," said the other, peevishly; and for some minutes they walked on side by side without a word.

"If I remember rightly," said Stocmar, "she was not put on her trial?"

"No; there was a great discussion about it, and many blamed the Crown lawyers for not including her; but, in truth, there was not a shadow of evidence to be brought against her. His treatment of her might have suggested the possibility of any vengeance."

"Was it so cruel?"

"Cruel is no word for it. There was not an insult, nor an outrage spared her. She passed one night in the deep snow in the garden, and was carried senseless into the house at morning, and only rallied after days of treatment. He fired at her another time."

"Shot her!"

"Yes, shot her through the shoulder—sent the bullet through here—because she would not write to Ogden a begging letter, entreating him to assist her with a couple of hundred pounds."

"Oh, that was too gross!" exclaimed Stocmar.

"He told her, 'You've cost me fifteen hundred in damages, and you may tell Ogden he shall have you back again for fifty.'"

"And she bore all this?"

"I don't know what you mean by bearing it. She did not stab him. Some say that Hawke was mad, but I never thought so. He had boastful fits at times, in which he would vaunt all his villanies, and tell you of the infamies he had done with this man and that; but they were purely the emanations of an intense vanity, which left him unable to conceal anything. Imagine, for instance, his boasting how he had done the 'Globe' office out of ten thousand, insured on his first wife's life—drowned when bathing. I heard the

story from his own lips, and I'll never forget his laugh as he said, 'I'd have been in a hole if Mary hadn't.'"

"That was madness, depend on't."

"No; I think not. It was partly vanity, for he delighted above all things to create an effect, and partly a studied plan to exercise an influence by actual terror, in which he had a considerable success. I could tell you of a score of men who would not have dared to thwart him; and it was at last downright desperation drove Tom Towers and Wake to"—he hesitated, faltered, and, in a weak voice, added—"to do it!"

"How was it brought about?" whispered Stocmar, cautiously.

Paten took out his cigar-case, selected a cigar with much care, lighted it, and, after smoking for some seconds, began: "It all happened this way: we met one night at that singing-place in the Haymarket. Towers, Wake, Collins, and myself were eating an oyster supper, when Hawke came in. He had been dining at the 'Rag,' and had won largely at whist from some young cavalry swells, who had just joined. He was flushed and excited, but not from drinking, for he said he had not tasted anything but claret-cup at dinner. 'You're a mangy-looking lot,' said he, 'with your stewed oysters and stout,' as he came up. 'Why, frozen-out gardeners are fine gentlemen in comparison. Are there no robberies going on at the Ottoman—nothing doing down at Grimshaw's?'

"'You're very bumptious about belonging to the "Rag," Hawke,' said Towers; 'but they'll serve you the same trick they did *me* one of these days.'

"'No, sir, they'll never turn *me* out,' said Hawke, insolently.

"'More fools they, then,' said the other; 'for you can do *ten* things for *one* that I can; and, what's more, you *have* done them.'

"'And will again, old boy, if that's any comfort to you,' cried Hawke, finishing off the other's malt. 'Waiter, fetch me some cold oysters, and score them to these gentlemen,' said he, gaily, taking his place amongst us. And so we chaffed away, about one thing or another, each one contributing some lucky or unlucky hit that had befallen him; but Hawke always bringing up how he had succeeded here, and what he had won there, and only vexed if any one reminded him that he had been ever 'let in' in his life.

"'Look here,' cried he, at last; 'ye're an uncommon seedy lot, very much out at elbows, and so I'll do you a generous turn. I'll take ye all over to my cottage at Jersey for a week,

house and grub you, and then turn you loose on the island, to do your wicked will with it.'

"'We take your offer—we say, Done!' cried Collins.

"'I should think you do! You've been sleeping under the colonnade of the Haymarket these last three nights,' said he to Collins, 'for want of a lodging. There's Towers chuckling over the thought of having false keys to all my locks; and Master Paul, yonder,' said he, grinning at me, 'is in love with my wife. Don't deny it, man; I broke open her writing-desk t'other day, and read all your letters to her: but I'm a generous dog; and, what's better,' added he, with an insolent laugh, 'one as bites, too—eh, Paul?—don't forget that.'

"'Do you mean the invitation to be real and bonâ fide?' growled out Towers; 'for I'm in no jesting humour.'

"'I do,' said Hawke, flourishing out a handful of bank notes; 'there's enough here to feed five times as many blacklegs; and more costly guests a man can't have.'

"'You'll go, won't you?' said Collins, to me, as we walked home together afterwards.

"'Well,' said I, doubtingly, 'I don't exactly see my way.'

"'By Jove!' cried he, 'you *are* afraid of him.'

"'Not a bit,' said I, impatiently. 'I'm well acquainted with his boastful habit; he's not so dangerous as he'd have us to believe.'

"'But will you go?—that's the question,' said he, more eagerly.

"'Why are you so anxious to know?' asked I, again.

"'I'll be frank with you,' said he, in a low, confidential tone. 'Towers wants to be certain of one thing. Mind, now,' added he, 'I'm sworn to secrecy, and I'm telling you now what I solemnly swore never to reveal; so don't betray me, Paul. Give me your hand on it.' And I gave him my hand.

"Even after I had given him this pledge he seemed to have become timorous, and for a few minutes he faltered and hesitated, totally unable to proceed. At last he said, half inquiringly,—

"'At all events, Paul, *you* cannot like Hawke?'

"'Like him! there is not the man on earth I hate as I hate *him!*'

"'That's exactly what Towers said: "Paul detests him more than we do."'

"'The moment Collins said these words the whole thing flashed full upon me. They were plotting to do for Hawke;

and wanted to know how far I might be trusted in the scheme.

"'Look here, Tom,' said I, confidentially; 'don't tell me anything. I don't want to be charged with other men's secrets; and, in return, I'll promise not to pry after them. "Make your little game," as they say at Ascot, and don't ask whether I'm in the ring or not. Do you understand me?'

"'I do, perfectly,' said he. 'The only point Towers really wanted to be sure of is, what of *her?* What he says is, there's no telling what a woman will do.'

"'If I were merely to give an opinion,' said I carelessly, 'I'd say, no danger from that quarter: but, mind, it's only an opinion.'

"'Wake says you'd marry her,' said he, bluntly, and with an abruptness that showed he had at length got courage to say what he wanted.

"'Tom Collins,' said I, seriously, 'let us play fair; don't question *me*, and I'll not question *you*.'

"'But you'll come along with us?' asked he, eagerly.

"'I'm not so sure of that, now,' said I; 'but if I do, it's on one only condition.'

"'And that is——?'

"'That I'm to know nothing, or hear nothing, of whatever you're about. I tell you distinctly that I'll not pry anywhere, but, in return, treat me as a stranger on whose discretion you cannot trust.'

"'You like sure profits and a safe venture, in fact,' said he, sneeringly.

"'Say one-half of that again, Collins,' said I, 'and I'll cut with the whole lot of you. I ask no share. I'd accept no share in your gains here.'

"'But you'll not peach on us, Paul?' said he, catching my hand.

"'Never,' said I, 'as long as you are on the square with *me*.'

"After this, he broke out into the wildest abuse of Hawke, making him out—as it was not hard to do—the greatest villain alive, mingling the attack with a variety of details of the vast sums he had latterly been receiving. 'There are,' he said, 'more than two thousand in hard cash in his hands at this moment, and a number of railway shares and some Peruvian bonds, part of his first wife's fortune, which he has just recovered by a lawsuit.' So close and accurate were all these details, so circumstantial every part of the story, that I perceived the plan must have been long prepared, and only

waiting for a favourable moment for execution. With this talk he occupied the whole way, till I reached my lodgings.

"'And now, Paul,' said he, 'before we part, give me your word of honour once more.'

"'There's my pledge,' said I, 'and there's my hand. So long as I hear nothing, and see nothing, I know nothing.' And we said good night, and separated.

"So long as I was talking with Collins," continued Paten—"so long, in fact, as I was taking my own side in the discussion—I did not see any difficulty in thus holding myself aloof from the scheme, and not taking any part whatever in the game played out before me; but when I found myself alone in my room, and began to conjure up an inquest and a trial, and all the searching details of a cross-examination, I trembled from head to foot. I remember to this hour how I walked to and fro in my room, putting questions to myself aloud, and in the tone of an examining counsel, till my heart sickened with fear; and when at last I lay down, wearied but not sleepy, on my bed, it was to swear a solemn vow that nothing on earth should induce me to go over to Jersey.

"The next day I was ill and tired, and I kept my bed, telling my servant to let no one disturb me on any pretext. Towers called, but was not admitted. Collins came twice, and tried hard to see me, but my man was firm, so that Tom was fain to write a few words on a card, in pencil: 'H. is ill at Limmer's; but it is only del. tremens, and he will be all right by Saturday. The boat leaves Blackwall at eleven. Don't fail to be in time.' This was Thursday. There was no time to lose, if I only knew what was best to be done. I'll not weary you with the terrible tale of that day's tortures; how I thought over every expedient in turn, and in turn rejected it; now, I would go to Hawke, and tell him everything; now, to the Secretary of State at the Home Office; now, to Scotland Yard, to inform the police; then I bethought me of trying to dissuade Towers and the others from the project; and at last I resolved to make a 'bolt' of it, and set out for Ireland by the night mail, and lie hid in some secluded spot till all was over. About four o'clock I got up, and throwing on my dressing-gown, I walked to the window. It was a dark, dull day, with a thin rain falling, and few persons about; but just as I was turning away from the window I saw a tall, coarse-looking fellow pass into the oyster-shop opposite, giving a glance up towards me as he went; the next minute a man in a long camlet cloak left the shop, and

walked down the street; and, muffled though he was from head to foot, I knew it was Towers.

"I suppose my conscience wasn't all right, for I sank down into a chair as sick as if I'd been a month in a fever. I saw they had set a watch on me, and I knew well the men I had to deal with. If Towers or Wake so much as suspected me, they'd make all safe before they ventured further. I looked out again, and there was the big man, with a dark blue woollen comforter round his throat, reading the advertisements on a closed shutter, and then strolling negligently along the street. Though his hat was pressed down over his eyes, I saw them watching me as he went; and such was my terror, that I fancied they were still gazing at me after he turned the corner.

"Fully determined now to make my escape, I sat down and wrote a few lines to Collins, saying that a relation of mine, from whom I had some small expectations, was taken suddenly ill, and sent for me to come over and see him, so that I was obliged to start for Ireland by that night's mail. I never once alluded to Jersey, but concluded with a kindly message to all friends, and a hasty good-bye.

"Desiring to have my servant out of the way, I despatched him with this note, and then set about making my own preparations for departure. It was now later than I suspected, so that I had barely time to pack some clothes hastily into a carpet-bag, and cautiously descended the stairs with it in my hand, opened the street door and issued forth. Before I had, however, gone ten yards from the door, the large man was at my side, and in a gruff voice offered to carry my bag. I refused as roughly, and walked on towards the cab-stand. I selected a cab, and said Euston Square; and as I did so the big fellow mounted the box and sat down beside the driver. I saw it was no use, and affecting to have forgotten something at my lodgings, I got out, paid the cab, and returned home. How cowardly! you'd say. No, Stocmar, I knew my men: it was *not* cowardly. I knew that, however they might abandon a project, or forego a plan, they would never, never forgive a confederate that tried to betray them. No, no," muttered he, below his breath; "no man shall tell me it was cowardice.

"When I saw that there was no way to turn back, I determined to go forward boldly, and even eagerly, trusting to the course of events to give me a chance of escape. I wrote to Collins to say that my relative was better, and should not require me to go over; and, in short, by eleven o'clock on the

appointed Saturday, we all assembled on the deck of the *St. Helier*, bound for Jersey.

"Never was a jollier party met for an excursion of pleasure—all but Hawke himself; he came aboard very ill, and went at once to his berth. He was in that most pitiable state, the commencing convalescence of delirium tremens, when all the terrors of a deranged mind still continue to disturb and distress the recovering intellect. As we went down one by one to see him, he would scarcely speak, or even notice us. At times, too, he seemed to have forgotten the circumstance which brought us all there, and he would mutter to himself, 'It was no good job gathered all these fellows together. Where can they be going to? What can they be after?' We had just sat down to dinner, when Towers came laughing into the cabin. 'What do you think,' said he to me, 'Hawke has just told me confidentially? He said, "I'm not at all easy about that lot on deck"—meaning you all. "The devil doesn't muster his men for mere drill and parade, and the moment I land in the island I'll tell the police to have an eye on them."' We laughed heartily at this polite intention of our host, and joked a good deal over the various imputations our presence might excite. From this we went on to talk over what was to be done if Hawke should continue ill, all being agreed that, having come so far, it would be impossible to forego our projected pleasure, and at last it was decided that I, by virtue of certain domestic relations ascribed to me, should enact the host, and do the honours of the house, and so they filled bumpers to the Regency, and I promised to be a mild Prince.

"'There's the thing for Godfrey,' said Towers, as some grilled chicken was handed round; and taking the dish from the waiter, he carried it himself to Hawke, and remained while he ate it. 'Poor devil!' said he, as he came back, 'he seems quite soft-hearted about my little attentions to him. He actually said, "Thank you, old fellow."'"

Perhaps our reader will thank us if we do not follow Paten through a narrative in which the minutest detail was recorded, nor any, even the most trivial, incident forgotten, graven as they were on a mind that was to retain them to the last. All the levities they indulged in during the voyage—which was, in fact, little other than an orgie from the hour they sailed to that they landed, dashed with little gloomy visits to that darkened sick berth where Hawke lay—all were remembered, all chronicled.

The cottage itself—The Hawke's Nest, as it was whimsically called—he described with all the picturesque ardour of

an artist. It was truly a most lovely spot, nestled down in a cleft between the hills, and so shut in from all wintry influences, that the oranges and myrtles overgrew it as though the soil were Italy. The grounds were of that half-park, half-garden order, which combines green sward and flowering border, and masses into one beauteous whole the glories of the forest-tree with the spray-like elegance of the shrub. There was a little lake, too, with an island, over whose leafy copper beeches a little Gothic spire appeared—an imitation of some richly ornamented shrine in Moorish Spain. What was it that in this dark story would still attract him to the scenery of this spot, making him linger and dally in it as though he could not tear himself away? Why would he loiter in description of some shady alley, some woodbine-trellised path, as though the scene had no other memories but those of a blissful bygone? In fact, such was the sort of fascination the locality seemed to exercise over him, that his voice grew softer, the words faltered as he spoke them, and once he drew his hand across his eyes, as though to wipe away a tear.

"Was it not strange, Stocmar," broke he suddenly in, "I was never able to see her one moment alone? She avoided it in fifty ways! Hawke kept his room for two days after we arrived, and we scarcely ever saw her, and when we did, it was hurriedly and passingly. Godfrey, too, he would send for one of us—always one, mark you, alone; and after a few muttering words about his suffering, he'd be sure to say, 'Can *you* tell me what has brought them all down here? I can't get it out of my head that there ain't mischief brewing.' Now each of us in turn had heard this speech, and we conned it over and over again. 'It's the woman has put this notion in his head,' said Towers. 'I'll take my oath it came from *her*. Look to *that*, Paul Hunt,' said he, to me, 'for you have influence in that quarter.' I retorted angrily to this, and very high words passed between us; in fact, the altercation went so far, that, when we met at dinner, we never addressed, or noticed, each other. I'll never forget that dinner. Wake seemed to range himself on Towers's side, and Collins looked half-disposed to take mine; everything that was said by one, was sure to be capped by some sharp impertinence by another, and we sat there interchanging slights and sneers and half-covert insolences for hours.

"If there had been a steamer for Southampton I'd have started next morning. I told Collins so when I went to my room; but he was much opposed to this, and said, 'If we draw back now, it must be with Towers and Wake—all

or none!' We passed nearly the entire night in discussing the point, and could not agree on it.

"I suppose that Hawke must have heard how ill we all got on together. There was a little girl—a daughter by his first wife—always in and out of the room where we were; and though in appearance a mere infant, the shrewdest, craftiest little sprite I ever beheld. Now this Clara, I suspect, told Hawke everything that passed. I know for certain that she was in the flower-garden, outside the window, during a very angry altercation between Towers and myself, and when I went up afterwards to see Hawke he knew the whole story.

"What a day that was! I had asked Loo to let me speak a few words with her alone, and, after great hesitation, she promised to meet me in the garden in the evening. I had determined on telling her everything. I was resolved to break with Towers and Wake, and I trusted to her clear head to advise how best to do it. The greater part of the morning Towers was up in Hawke's room; he had always an immense influence over Godfrey; he knew things about him none others had ever heard of, and, when he came downstairs, he took the doctor—it was your old Professor, that mad fellow—into the library, and spent full an hour with him. When Towers came out afterwards he seemed to have got over his angry feeling towards me, and coming up in all seeming frankness, took my arm, and led me out into the shrubbery.

"'Hawke is sinking rapidly,' said he; 'the doctor says he cannot possibly recover.'

"'Indeed!' said I, amazed. 'What does he call the malady?'

"'He says it's a break-up—a general smash—lungs, liver, brain, all destroyed; a common complaint with fellows who have lived hard.' He looked at me steadily, almost fiercely, as he said this, but I seemed quite insensible to his gaze. 'He'll not leave *her* a farthing,' added he, after a moment.

"'The greater villain he, then,' said I. 'It was for *him* she ruined herself.'

"'Yes, yes, that was all true enough once; but *now*, Master Paul—now, there's another story, you know.'

"'If you mean under the guise of a confidence to renew the insults you dared to pass upon me yesterday,' said I, 'I tell you at once I'll not bear it.'

"'Can't you distinguish between friendship and indifference?' said he, warmly. 'I don't ask you to trust me with

your secrets, but let us talk like men, not like children. Hawke intends to alter his will to-morrow. It had been made in her favour; at least, he left her this place here, and some small thing he had in Wales; he's going to change everything and leave all to the girl.'

"'It can't be a considerable thing after all,' said I, peevishly, and not well knowing what I said.

"'Pardon me,' broke he in; 'he has won far more than any of us suspected. He has in hard cash above two thousand pounds in the house, a mass of acceptances in good paper, and several bonds of first-rate men. I went over his papers this morning with him, and saw his book, too, for the Oaks—a thing, I suppose, he had never shown to any living man before. He has let us all in there, Paul—he has, by Jove! for while telling us to put all upon Jeremy, he's going to win with Proserpine!'

"I confess the baseness of this treachery sickened me.

"'"How Paul will storm, and rave, and curse me, when he finds it out," said he; "but there was no love lost between us." He never liked you, Hunt—never.'

"'It's not too late yet,' said I, 'to hedge about and save ourselves.'

"'No, there's time still, especially if *he* "hops the twig." Now,' said he, after a long pause, 'if by any chance he were to die to-night, *she*'d be safe—she'd at least inherit some hundreds a year, and a good deal of personal property.'

"'There's no chance of *that*, though,' said I, negligently.

"'Who told you so, Paul?' said he, with a cunning cast of his eye. 'That old drunken doctor said he'd not insure him for twenty-four hours. A rum old beast he is! Do you know what he said to me a while ago? "Captain," said he, "do you know anything about chemistry?" "Nothing whatever," said I. "Well," said he with a hiccup—for he was far gone in liquor—"albumen is the antidote to the muriate; and if you want to give him a longer line, let him have an egg to eat."'"

"Good Heavens! Do you mean that he suspected——"

"He was dead drunk two minutes afterwards, and said that Hawke was dying of typhus, and that he'd certify under his hand. 'But no matter about *him*,' said he, impatiently. 'If Hawke goes off to-night, it will be a good thing for all of us. Here's this imp of a child!' muttered he, below his breath; 'let us be careful.' And so we parted company, each taking his own road.

"I walked about the grounds alone all day—I need not

tell you with what a heavy heart and a loaded conscience—and only came back to dinner. We were just sitting down to table, when the door opened, and, like a corpse out of his grave, Hawke stole slowly in, and sat down amongst us. He never spoke a word, nor looked at any one. I swear to you, so terrible was the apparition, so ghastly, and so death-like, that I almost doubted if he were still living.

"'Well done, old boy! there's nothing will do you such good as a little cheering up," cried Towers.

"'*She*'s asleep,' said he, in a low, feeble voice, 'and so I stole down to eat my last dinner with you.'

"'Not the last for many a year to come,' said Wake, filling his glass. 'The doctor says you are made of iron.'

"'A man of mettle, I suppose,' said he, with a feeble attempt to laugh.

"'There! isn't he quite himself again?' cried Wake. 'By George! he'll see us all down yet!'

"'Down, where?' said Hawke, solemnly. And the tone and the words struck a chill over us.

"We did not rally for some time, and when we did, it was with an effort forced and unnatural. Hawke took something on his plate, but ate none of it, turning the meat over with his fork in a listless way. His wine, too, he laid down when half way to his lips, and then spat it out over the carpet, saying to himself something inaudible.

"'What's the matter, Godfrey? Don't you like that capital sherry?' said Towers.

"'No,' said he, in a hollow, sepulchral voice.

"'We have all pronounced it admirable,' went on the other.

"'It burns—everything burns,' said the sick man.

"I filled him a glass of iced water and handed it to him, and Towers gave me a look so full of hate and vengeance, that my hand nearly let the tumbler drop.

"'Don't drink cold water, man!' cried Towers, catching his arm; 'that is the worst thing in the world for you.'

"'It won't poison me, will it?' said Hawke. And he fixed his leaden, glazy gaze on Towers.

"'What the devil do you mean?' cried he, savagely. 'This is an ugly jest, sir.'

"The sick man, evidently more startled by the violence of the manner than by the words themselves, looked from one to the other of us all round the table.

"'Forgive me, old fellow,' burst in Towers, with an attempt to laugh; 'but the whole of this day, I can't say why or how,

but everything irritates and chafes me. I really believe that we all eat and drink too well here. We live like fighting-cocks, and, of course, are always ready for conflict.'

"We all did our best to forget the unpleasant interruption of a few minutes back, and talked away with a sort of over-eagerness. But Hawke never spoke; there he sat, turning his glazed, filmy look from one to the other, as though in vain trying to catch up something of what went forward. He looked so ill—so fearfully ill, all the while, that it seemed a shame to sit carousing there around him, and so I whispered to Collins, but Towers overheard me, and said,—

"'All wrong. *You* don't know what tough material he is made of. This is the very thing to rally him—eh, Godfrey?' cried he, louder. 'I'm telling these fellows that you'll be all the better for coming down amongst us, and that when I've made you a brew of that milk-punch you are so fond of——'

"'It won't burn my throat, will it?' whined out the sick man.

"'Burn your throat! not a bit of it; but warm your blood up, give energy to your heart, and brace your nerves, so that before the bowl is finished you'll sing us "Tom Hall;" or, better still, "That rainy day I met her"—

> "That rainy day I met her,
> When she tripped along the street,
> And, with petticoat half lifted,
> Showed a dainty pair of feet."

How does it go?' said he, trying to catch the tune.

"A ghastly grin—an expression more horrible than I ever saw on a human face before—was Hawke's recognition of this appeal to him, and beating his fingers feebly on the table, he seemed trying to recall the air.

"'I can't stand this any longer,' whispered Wake to me; 'the man is dying!'

"'Confound you for a fool!' said Towers, angrily. 'You'll see what a change an hour will make in him. I've got the receipt for that milk-punch up in my room. I'll go and fetch it.' And with this he arose, and hastily left the room.

"'Where's Tom?' said the sick man, with a look of painful eagerness. 'Where is he?'

"'He's gone for the receipt of the milk-punch; he's going to make a brew for you!' said I.

"'But I won't take it. I'll taste nothing more,' said he, with a marked emphasis. 'I'll take nothing but what Loo gives me,' muttered he, below his breath. And we all exchanged significant looks with each other.

"'This will never do,' murmured Wake, in a low voice. 'Say something—tell a story—but let us keep moving.'

"And Collins began some narrative of his early experiences on the Turf. The story, like all such, was the old burden of knave and dupe—the man who trusted and the man who cheated. None of us paid much attention to the details, but drank away at our wine, and sent the decanters briskly round, when suddenly, at the mention of a horse being found dead in his stall on the morning he was to have run, Hawke broke in with 'Nobbled! Just like me!'

"Though the words were uttered in a sort of reverie, and with a bent-down head, we all were struck dumb, and gazed ruefully at each other. 'Where's Towers all this time?' said Collins to me, in a whisper. I looked at my watch, and saw that it was forty-four minutes since he left the room. I almost started up from my seat with terror, as I thought what this long absence might portend. Had he actually gone off, leaving us all to the perils that were surrounding us? Was it that he had gone to betray us to the law? I could not speak from fear when the door opened, and he came in and sat down in his place. Though endeavouring to seem easy and unconcerned, I could mark that he wore an air of triumph and success that he could not subdue.

"'Here comes the brew,' said he, as the servant brought in a large smoking bowl of fragrant mixture.

"'I'll not touch it!' said Hawke, with a resolute tone that startled us.

"'What! after giving me more than half an hour's trouble in preparing it,' said Towers. 'Come, old fellow, that is not gracious.'

"'Drink it yourselves!' said Hawke, sulkily.

"'So we will, after we have finished this Burgundy,' said Towers. 'But, meanwhile, what will *you* have? It's poor fun to sit here with an empty glass.' And he filled him out a goblet of the milk-punch and placed it before him. 'Here's to the yellow jacket with black sleeves,' said he, lifting his glass; 'and may we see him the first "round the corner."'

"'First "round the corner!"' chorussed the rest of us. And Hawke, catching up the spirit of the toast, seized his glass and drank it off.

"'I knew he'd drink his own colours if he had one leg in the grave!' said Towers.

"The clock on the mantelpiece struck ten at the moment. It was the hour I was to meet her in the shrubbery; and so,

pretending to go in search of my cigar-case, I slipped away and left them. As I was passing behind Hawke's chair, he made a gesture to me to come near him. I bent down my head to him, and he said, 'It won't do this time; she'll not meet you, Paul.' These were the last words I ever heard him speak."

When Paten had got thus far, he walked away from his friend, and, leaning his arm on the bulwark, seemed overwhelmed with the dreary retrospect. He remained thus for a considerable time, and only rallied as Stocmar, drawing his arm within his, said, "Come, come, this is no fresh sorrow now. Let me hear the remainder."

"He spoke truly," said he, in a broken voice. "She never came! I walked the grounds for above an hour and a half, and then I came back towards the cottage. There was a light in her room, and I whistled to attract her notice, and threw some gravel against the glass, but she only closed the shutters, and did not mind me. I cannot tell you how my mind was racked between the actual terror of the situation and the vague dread of some unknown evil. What had produced this change in *her?* Why had *she* broken with me? Could it be that Towers had seen her in that long interval he was absent from the table, and, if so, to what intent? She always hated and dreaded him; but who could tell what influence such a man might acquire in a moment of terrible interest? A horrible sense of jealousy—not the less maddening that it was shadowy and uncertain—now filled my mind; and—would you believe it?—I thought worse of Towers for his conduct towards me than for the dreadful plot against Hawke. Chance led me, as I walked, to the bank of the little lake, where I stood for some time thinking. Suddenly a splash—too heavy for the spring of a fish—startled me, and immediately after I heard the sound of some one forcing his way through the close underwood beside me. Before I had well rallied from my astonishment, a voice I well knew to be that of Towers, cried out,—

"'Who's there?—who are you?'

"I called out, 'Hunt—Paul Hunt!'

"'And what the devil brings you here, may I ask?' said he, insolently, but in a tone that showed he had been drinking deeply.

"It was no time to provoke discord; it was a moment that demanded all we could muster of concession and agreement, and so I simply told how mere accident had turned my steps in this direction.

"'What if I said I don't believe you, Paul Hunt?' retorted he, savagely. 'What if I said that I see your whole game in this business, and know every turn and every trick you mean to play us?'

"'If you had not drunk so much of Godfrey's Burgundy,' said I, 'you'd never have spoken this way to an old friend.'

"'Friend be ——!' cried he, savagely. 'I know no friends but the men who will share danger with you as well as drink out of the same bottle. Why did you leave us this evening?'

"'I'll be frank with you, Tom,' said I. 'I had made a rendezvous with Louisa; but she never came.'

"'Why should she?' muttered he, angrily. 'Why should she trust the man who is false to his pals?'

"'That I have never been,' broke I in. 'Ask Hawke himself. Ask Godfrey, and he'll tell you whether I have ever dropped a word against you.'

"'No, he wouldn't,' said he, doggedly.

"'I tell you he would,' cried I. 'Let us go to him this minute.'

"'I'd rather not, if the choice were given me,' said he, with a horrid laugh.

"'Do you mean,' cried I, in terror—'do you mean that it is all over?'

"'All over!' said he, gravely, and as though his clouded faculties were suddenly cleared. 'Godfrey knows all about it by this time,' muttered he, half to himself.

"'Would to Heaven we had never come here!' burst I in, for my heart was breaking with anguish and remorse. 'How did it happen, and where?'

"'In the chair where you last saw him. We thought he had fallen asleep, and were for having him carried up to bed, when he gave a slight shudder and woke up again. "Where's Loo?" cried he, in a weak voice; and then, before we could answer, he added, "Where's Hunt?"

"'"Paul was here a moment ago; he'll be back immediately."

"'He gave a laugh—such a laugh I hope never to hear again. Cold as he lies there now, that terrible grin is on his face yet. "You've done it this time, Tom," said he to me, in a whisper. "What do you mean?" said I. "Death!" said he; "it's all up with *me—your* time is coming." And he gave a ghastly grin, sighed, and it was over.'

"We both sat down on the damp ground, and never spoke

for nigh an hour. At last Tom said, 'We ought to be back in the house, and trying to make ourselves useful, Paul.'

"I arose, and walked after him, not knowing well whither I was going. When we reached the little flower-garden, we could see into the dining-room. The branch of wax-candles were still lighted, but burnt down very low. All had left; there was nothing there but the dead man sitting up in his chair, with his eyes staring, and his chin fallen. 'Craven-hearted scoundrels!' cried Towers. 'The last thing I said was to call in the servants, and say that their master had fainted; and see, they have run away out of sheer terror. Ain't these hopeful fellows to go before the coroner's inquest?' I was trembling from head to foot all this while, and had to hold Towers by the arm to support myself. 'You are not much better!' said he, savagely. 'Get to bed, and take a long sleep, man. Lock your door, and open it to none till I come to you.' I staggered away as well as I could, and reached my room. Once alone there, I fell on my knees and tried to pray, but I could not. I could do nothing but cry—cry, as though my heart would burst; and I fell off asleep, at last, with my head on the bedside, and never awoke till the next day at noon. Oh!" cried he, in a tone of anguish, "do not ask me to recall more of this dreadful story; I'd rather follow the others to the scaffold, than I'd live over again that terrible day. But you know the rest—the whole world knows it. It was the 'Awful Tragedy in Jersey' of every newspaper of England; even to the little cottage, in the print-shop windows, the curiosity of the town was gratified. The Pulpit employed the theme, to illustrate the life of the debauchee; and the Stage repeated the incidents in a melodrama. With a vindictive inquisitiveness, too, the Press continued to pry after each of us, whither we had gone, and what had become of us. I myself, at last, escaped further scrutiny by the accidental circumstance of a pauper, called Paul Hunt, having died in a poorhouse, furnishing the journalist who recorded it one more occasion for moral reflection and eloquence. Collins lived, I know not how or where. She sailed for Australia, but I believe never went beyond the Cape."

"And you never met her since?"

"Never."

"Nor have you held any correspondence together?"

"None, directly. I have received some messages; one to that purport I have already told you. Indeed, it was but t'other day that I knew for certain she was in Europe."

"What was she in appearance—what style and manner of person?"

"You shall guess before I tell you," said Paten, smiling sadly.

"A dark-eyed, dark-haired woman—brunette—tall—with a commanding look—thin lips—and strongly-marked chin."

"Here," said he, approaching the binnacle lantern, and holding out a miniature he had drawn from his breast—"here you can recognize the accuracy of your description."

"But can that be like her?"

"It is herself; even the careless ease of the attitude, the voluptuous indolence of the 'pose,' is all her own."

"But she is the very type of feminine softness and delicacy. I never saw eyes more full of gentle meaning, nor a mouth more expressive of womanly grace."

"There is no flattery in the portrait; nay, it wants the great charm she excelled in—that ever changeful look, as thoughts of joy or sadness would flash across her."

"Good Heavens!" cried Stocmar. "How hard it is to connect this creature, as she looks here, with such a story!"

"Ah, my friend, these have been the cruel ones, from the earliest time we hear of. The more intensely they are womanly, the more unrelenting their nature."

"And what do you mean to do, Ludlow? for I own to you I think she is a hard adversary to cope with."

"I'll marry her, if she'll have me."

"Have you? Of course she will."

"She says not; and she generally keeps her word."

"But why should you wish to marry her, Ludlow? You have already told me that you know nothing of her means, or how she lives; and, certainly, the memories of the past give small guarantee for the future. As for myself, I own to you, if there was not another woman——"

"Nay, nay," broke in Paten, "you have never seen her—never spoken to her."

"You forget, my dear fellow, that I have passed a life in an atmosphere of mock fascinations; that tinsel attractions and counterfeit graces would all fail with *me*."

"But who says they are factitious?" cried Paten, angrily. "The money that passes from hand to hand, as current coin, may have some alloy in its composition a chemist might call base, but it will not serve to stamp it as fraudulent. I tell you, Stocmar, it is the whole fortune of a man's life to be associated with such a woman. They can mar or make you."

"More likely the first," muttered Stocmar. And then

added aloud, "and as to her fortune, you actually know nothing."

"Nothing beyond the fact that there's money somewhere. The girl or she, I can't say which, has it."

"And of course, in your eyes, it's like a pool at écarté: you don't trouble your head who are the contributors?"

"Not very much, if I win, Stocmar!" said he, resuming at once all the wonted ease of his jovial manner.

Stocmar walked the deck in deep thought. The terrible tale he had just heard, though not new in all its details, had impressed him fearfully, while at the same time he could not conceive how a man so burdened with a horrible past could continue either to enjoy the present or speculate on the future.

At last he said, "And have you no dread of recognition, Ludlow? Is the danger of being known and addressed by your real name not always uppermost with you?"

"No, not now. When I first returned to England, after leaving the Austrian service, I always went about with an uneasy impression upon me—a sort of feeling that when men looked at me they were trying to remember where, and when, and how, they had seen that face before; but up to this none have ever discovered me, except Dell the detective officer, whom I met one night at Cremorne, and who whispered me softly, 'Happy to see you, Mr. Hunt. Have you been long in England?' I affected at first not to understand him, and touching his hat politely, he said, 'Well, sir—Jos. Dell. If you remember, I was *there* at the inquest.' I invited him to share a bottle of wine with me at once, and we parted like old friends. By the way," added he, "there was that old pyrotechnist of yours—that drunken rascal—*he* knew me, too."

"Well, you're not likely to be troubled with another recognition from him, Ludlow."

"How so? Is the fellow dead?"

"No; but I've shipped him to New York by the *Persia*. Truby, of the Bowery Theatre, has taken a three years' lease of him, and of course cocktails and juleps will shorten even that."

"*That* is a relief, by Jove!" cried Paten. "I own to you, Stocmar, the thought of being known by that man lay like a stone on my heart. Had you any trouble in inducing him to go?"

"Trouble? No. He went on board drunk; he'll be drunk all the voyage, and he'll land in America in the same happy state."

Paten smiled pleasantly at this picture of beatitude, and smoked on. "There's no doubt about it, Stocmar," said he, sententiously, "we all of us do make cowards of ourselves quite needlessly, imagining that the world is full of us, canvassing our characters and scrutinizing our actions, when the same good world is only thinking of itself and its own affairs."

"That is true in part, Ludlow. But let us make ourselves foreground figures, and, take my word for it, we'll not have to complain of want of notice."

Paten made a movement of impatience at this speech, that showed how little he liked the sentiment, and then said,—

"There are the lights of Ostend. What a capital passage we have made! I can't express to you," said he, with more animation, "what a relief it is to me to feel myself on the soil of the Continent. I don't know how it affects others, but to me it seems as if there were greater scope and a freer room for a man's natural abilities there."

"I suppose you think we are cursed with 'respectability' at home."

"The very thing I mean," said he, gaily; "there's nothing I detest like it."

"Colonel Paten," cried the steward, collecting his fees.

"Are you Colonel?" asked Stocmar, in a whisper.

"Of course I am, and very modest not to be Major-General. But here we are, inside the harbour already."

Were we free to take a ramble up the Rhine country, and over the Alps to Como, we might, perhaps, follow the steps of the two travellers we have here presented to our reader. They were ultimately bound for Italy, but in nowise tied by time or route. In fact, Mr. Stocmar's object was to seek out some novelties for the coming season. "Nihil humanum a me alienum puto" was his maxim. All was acceptable that was attractive. He catered for the most costly of all publics, and who will insist on listening to the sweetest voices, and looking at the prettiest legs in Europe. He was on the look-out for both. What Ludlow Paten's object was the reader may, perhaps, guess without difficulty, but there was another "transaction" in his plan not so easily determined. He had heard much of Clara Hawke—to give her her true name—of her personal attractions and abilities, and he wished Stocmar to see and pronounce upon her. Although he possessed no pretension to dispose of her whatever, he held certain letters of her supposed mother in his keeping which gave him a degree of power which he believed irresistible.

Now, there is a sort of limited liability slavery at this moment recognized in Europe, by which theatrical managers obtain a lease of human ability, for a certain period, under nonage, and of which Paten desired to derive profit by letting Clara out as dancer, singer, comedian, or "figurante," according to her gifts; and this, too, was a purpose of the present journey.

The painter or the sculptor, in search of his model, has no higher requirements than those of form and symmetry; he deals solely with externals, while the impresario must carry his investigations far beyond the category of personal attractions, and soar into the lofty atmosphere of intellectual gifts and graces, bearing along with him, at the same time, a full knowledge of that public for whom he is proceeding; that fickle, changeful, fanciful public, who sometimes, out of pure satiety with what is best, begin to long for what is second-rate. What consummate skill must be his who thus feels the pulse of fashion, recognizing in its beat the indications of this or that tendency, whether "society" soars to the classic "Norma," or descends to the tawdry vulgarisms of the "Traviata"! No man ever accepted more implicitly than Mr. Stocmar the adage of "Whatever is, is best." The judgment of the day with him was absolute. The "world" *a toujours raison*, was his creed. When that world pronounced for music, he cried, "Long live Verdi!" when it decided for the ballet, his toast was, "Legs against the field!" Now, at this precise moment, this same world had taken a turn for mere good looks—if it be not heresy to say "mere" to such a thing as beauty—and had actually grown a little wearied of roulades and pirouettes; and so Stocmar had come abroad, to see what the great slave market of Europe could offer him.

Let us suppose them, therefore, pleasantly meandering along through the Rhineland, while we turn once more to those whom we have left beyond the Alps.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FRAGMENT OF A LETTER.

The following brief epistle from Mrs. Morris to her father will save the reader the tedious task of following the Heathcote family through an uneventful interval, and at the same time bring him to that place and period in which we wish to see him. It is dated Hôtel d'Italie, Florence :—

"Dear Papa,—You are not to feel any shock or alarm at the black margin and wax of this epistle, though its object be to inform you that I am a widow, Captain Penthony Morris having died some eight months back in Upper India; but the news has only reached me now. In a word, I have thought it high time to put an end to this mythical personage, whose cruel treatment of me I had grown tired of recalling, and, I conclude, others of listening to. Now, although it may be very hard on you to go into mourning for the death of one who never lived, yet I must bespeak your grief, in so far as stationery is concerned, and that you write to me on the most woebegone of cream-laid, and with the most sorrow-struck of seals.

"There was, besides, another and most cogent reason for my being a widow just now. The Heathcotes are here, on their way to Rome, and, like all English people, eager to go everywhere, do everything, and know everybody; the consequence is eternal junketing and daily dinner-parties. I need not tell you that in such a caravanserai as this is, some one would surely turn up who should recognize me; so there was nothing for it but to kill Captain M. and go into crape and seclusion. As my bereavement is only a sham, I perform the affliction without difficulty. Our mourning, too, becomes us, and, everything considered, the incident has spared us much sight-seeing and many odious acquaintances.

"As it is highly important that I should see and consult you, you must come out here at once. As the friend and executor of poor 'dear Penthony,' you can see me freely, and I really want your advice. Do I understand you aright about Ludlow? If so, the creature is a greater fool than I thought

him. Marrying him is purely out of the question. Of all compacts, the connubial demands implicit credulity; and if this poor man's tea were to disagree with him, he'd be screaming out for antidotes before the servants, and I conclude that he cannot expect *me* to believe in *him*. The offer you have made him on my part is a great and brilliant one, and, for the life of me, I cannot see why he should hesitate about it, though I, perhaps, suspect it to be this. Like most fast men—a very shallow class, after all—his notion is, that life, like a whist-party, requires an accomplice. Now, I would beg him to believe this is not the case, and that for two people who can play their cards so well as we can, it is far better to sit down at separate tables, where no suspicion of complicity can attach to us. I, at least, understand what suits my own interest, which is distinctly and emphatically to have nothing to do with him. You say that he threatens—threatens to engulf us both. If he were a woman, the menace would frighten me, but men are marvellously conservative in their selfishness, and so I read it as mere threat.

"It is, I will say, no small infliction to carry all this burden of the past through a present rugged enough with its own difficulties. To feel that one can be compromised, and, if compromised, ruined at any moment—to walk with a half-drawn indictment over one—to mingle in a world where each fresh arrival may turn out accuser,—is very, very wearisome, and I long for security. It is for this reason I have decided on marrying Sir William instead of his son. The indiscretion of a man of his age taking a wife of mine will naturally lead to retirement and reclusion from the world, and we shall seek out some little visited spot where no awkward memories are like to leave their cards on us. I have resigned myself to so much in life, that I shall submit to all this with as good a grace as I have shown in other sacrifices. Of course L. can spoil this project—he can upset the boat—but he ought to remember, if he does, that he was never a good swimmer. Do try and impress this upon him; there are usually some flitting moments of every day when he is capable of understanding a reason. Catch one of these, dear pa, and profit by it. It is by no means certain that Miss L. would accept him; but, certainly, smarting as she is under all manner of broken ties, the moment is favourable, and the stake a large one. Nor is there much time to lose, for it seems that young Heathcote cannot persuade the Horse Guards to give him even a 'Cornetcy,' and is in despair how he is to re-enter the service; the inevitable consequence of which will be a

return home here, and, after a while, a reconciliation. It is only wise people who ever know that the science of life is opportunity, everything being possible at some one moment, which, perhaps, never recurs again.

"I scarcely know what to say about Clara. She has lost her spirits, though gained in looks, and she is a perfect mope, but very pretty withal. She fancies herself in love with a young college man lately here, who won all the disposable hearts in the place, and might have had a share even in mine, if he had asked for it. The greater fool he that he did not, since he wanted exactly such guidance as I could give to open the secret door of success to him. By the way, has his father died, or what has become of him? In turning over some papers t'other day, the name recurred with some far from pleasant recollections associated with it. Scientific folk used to tell us that all the constituents of our mortal bodies became consumed every seven years of life. And why, I ask, ought we not to start with fresh memories as well as muscles, and ignore any past beyond that short term of existence? I am perfectly convinced it is carrying along bygones, whether of events or people, that constitutes the greatest ill of life. One so very seldom repents of having done wrong, and is so very, very sorry to have lost many opportunities of securing success, that really the past is all sorrow.

"You have forgotten to counsel me about Clara. The alternative lies between the stage and a convent. Pray say which of the two, in these changeful times, gives the best promise of permanence; and believe me,

"Your affectionate daughter,

"LOUISA."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE O'SHEA AT HIS LODGINGS.

A VERY brief chapter will suffice to record the doings of two of our characters, not destined to perform very foreground parts in the present drama. We mean Mr. O'Shea and Charles Heathcote. They had established themselves in lodgings in a certain locality called Manchester Buildings, much favoured by some persons who haunt the avenues of "the House," and are always in search of "our Borough Member." Neither the aspect of their domicile, nor their style of living, bespoke flourishing circumstances. O'Shea, indeed, had returned to town in cash, but an unlucky night at the "Garottoman" had finished him, and he returned to his lodgings one morning at daybreak two hundred and seventeen pounds worse than nothing.

Heathcote had not played; nay, he had lived almost penuriously; but in a few weeks all his resources were nigh exhausted, and no favourable change had occurred in his fortunes. At the Horse Guards he had been completely unsuccessful. He had served, it is true, with distinction, but, as he had quitted the army, he could not expect to be restored to his former rank, while, by the rules of the service, he was too old to enter as a subaltern. And thus a trained soldier, who had won fame and honour in two campaigns, was, at the age of twenty-six, decided to be superannuated. It was the chance meeting of O'Shea in the street, when this dilemma was mentioned, that led to their ultimate companionship, for the Member at once swore to bring the case before the House, and to make the country ring from end to end with the enormity. Poor Heathcote, friendless and alone at the moment, caught at the promise, and a few days afterwards saw them domesticated as chums at No. —, in the locality already mentioned.

"You'll have to cram me, Heathcote, with the whole case. I must be able to make an effective speech, narrating all the great exploits you have done, with everywhere you have been, before I come to the grievance, and the motion for 'all the correspondence between Captain Heathcote and the author-

ities at the Horse Guards, respecting his application to be reinstated in the army.' I'll get a special Tuesday for the motion, and I'll have Howley in to second me, and maybe we won't shake the Treasury benches! for you see the question opens everything that ever was, or could be, said about the army. It opens Horse Guards cruelty and irresponsibility, those Bashi-Bazouks that rule the service like despots; it opens the purchase system from end to end; it opens the question of promotion by merit; it opens the great problem of retirement and superannuation. By my conscience! I think I could bring the Thirty-nine Articles into it, if I was vexed."

The Member for Inch had all that persuasive power a ready tongue and an unscrupulous temper supply, and speedily convinced the young soldier that his case would not alone redound to his own advancement but become a precedent, which should benefit hundreds of others equally badly treated as himself.

It was while thus conning over the project, O'Shea mentioned, in deepest confidence, the means of that extraordinary success which, he averred, had never failed to attend all his efforts in the House, and this was, that he never ventured on one of his grand displays without a previous rehearsal at home; that is, he assembled at his own lodgings a supper company of his most acute and intelligent friends—young barristers, men engaged on the daily or weekly press—the smart squib-writers and caricaturists of the day—alive to everything ridiculous, and unsparing in their criticism; and by these was he judged in a sort of mock Parliament formed by themselves. To each of these was allotted the character of some noted speaker in the House, who did his best to personate the individual by every trait of manner, voice, and action, while a grave, imposing looking-man, named Doran, was a capital counterfeit of the "Speaker."

O'Shea explained to Heathcote, that the great advantage of this scheme consisted in the way it secured one against surprises; no possible interruption being omitted, nor any cavilling objection spared to the orator. "You'll see," he added, "that after sustaining these assaults, the attack of the real fellows is only pastime."

The day being fixed on, the company, numbering nigh twenty, assembled, and Charles Heathcote could not avoid observing that their general air and appearance were scarcely senatorial. O'Shea assured him gravity would soon succeed to the supper, and dignity come in with the whisky-punch. This was so far borne out, that when the cloth was

removed, and a number of glasses and bottles were distributed over the blackened mahogany, a grave and almost austere bearing was at once assumed by the meeting. Doran also took his place as Speaker, his cotton umbrella being laid before him as the mace. The orders of the day were speedily disposed of, and a few questions as to the supply of potables satisfactorily answered, when O'Shea arose to bring on the case of the evening—a motion "for all the correspondence between the authorities of the Horse Guards and Captain Heathcote, respecting the application of the latter to be reinstated in the service."

The Secretary-at-War, a red-faced, pimply man, sub-editor of a Sunday paper, objected to the production of the papers; and a smart sparring-match ensued, in which O'Shea suffered rather heavily, but at last came out victorious, being allowed to state the grounds for his application.

O'Shea began with due solemnity, modestly assuring the House that he wished the task had fallen to one more competent than himself, and more conversant with those professional details which would necessarily occupy a large space in the narrative.

"Surely the honourable member held a commission in the Clare Fencibles."

"Was not the honourable member's father a band-master in the Fifty-fourth?" cried another.

"To the insolent interruptions which have met me," said O'Shea, indignantly——

"Order! order!"

"Am I out of order, sir?" asked he of the Speaker.

"Clearly so," replied that functionary. "Every interruption, short of a knock-down, is parliamentary."

"I bow to the authority of the chair, and I say that he ruffianly allusions of certain honourable members 'pass by me like the idle wind, that I regard not.'"

"Where's that from? Take you two to one in half-crowns you can't tell," cried one.

"Done!" "Order! order!" "Spoke!" with cries of "Go on!" here convulsed the meeting; after which O'Shea resumed his discourse.

"When, sir," said he, "I undertook to bring under the notice of this House, and consequently before the eyes of the nation, the case of a distinguished officer, one whose gallant services in the tented field, whose glorious achievements before the enemy have made his name famous in all the annals of military distinction, I never anticipated to have been met

by the howls of faction, or the discordant yells of disappointed and disorderly followers—mere *condottieri*—of the contemptible tyrant who now scowls at me from the cross-benches."

Loud cheers of applause followed this burst of indignation.

An animated conversation now ensued as to whether this was strictly parliamentary; some averring that they "had heard worse," others deeming it a shade too violent, O'Shea insisting throughout that there never was a sharp debate in the House without far blacker insinuations, while in the Irish Parliament such courtesies were continually interchanged, and very much admired.

"Wasn't it Lawrence Parsons who spoke of the 'highly-gifted blackguard on the other side?'" and "Didn't John Toler allude to the 'ignorant and destitute spendthrift who now sat for the beggarly borough of Athlone?'" cried two or three advocates of vigorous language.

"There's worse in Homer," said another, settling the question on classical authority.

The discussion grew warm. What was, and what was not, admissible in language was eagerly debated; the interchange of opinion, in a great measure, serving to show that there were few, if any, freedoms of speech that might not be indulged in. Indeed, Heathcote's astonishment was only at the amount of endurance exhibited by each in turn, so candid were the expressions employed, so free from all disguise the depreciatory sentiments entertained.

In the midst of what had now become a complete uproar, and while one of the orators, who, by dint of lungs, had overcome all competitors, was inveighing against O'Shea as "a traitor to his party, and the scorn of every true Irishman," a fresh arrival, heated and almost breathless, rushed into the room.

"It's all over," cried he; "the Government is beaten. The House is to be dissolved on Wednesday, and the country to go to a general election."

Had a shell fallen on the table the dispersion could not have been more instantaneous. Barristers, reporters, borough agents, and penny-a-liners, all saw their harvest-time before them, and hurried away to make their engagements; and, in less than a quarter of an hour, O'Shea was left alone with his companion, Charles Heathcote.

"Here's a shindy!" cried the ex-M.P., "and the devil a chance I have of getting in again, if I can't raise five hundred pounds."

Heathcote never spoke, but sat ruminating over the news.

"Bad luck to the Cabinet!" muttered O'Shea. "Why would they put that stupid clause into their Bill? Couldn't they wait to smuggle it in on a committee? Here I am clean ruined and undone, just as I was on the road to fame and fortune. And I can't even help a friend!" said he, turning a pitiful look at Heathcote.

"Don't waste a thought about me!" said Heathcote, good-humouredly.

"But I will!" cried O'Shea. "I'll go down to the Horse Guards myself. Sure I'm forgetting already," added he, with a sigh, "that we're all 'out'; and now, for a trifle of five hundred, there's a fine chance lost as ever man had. You don't know anybody could accommodate one with a loan—of course, on suitable terms?"

"Not one—not one!"

"Or who'd do it on a bill at three months, with our own names?"

"None!"

"Isn't it hard, I ask—isn't it cruel—just as I was making a figure in the House? I was the 'rising man of the party'—so the *Post* called me—and the *Freeman* said, 'O'Shea has only to be prudent and his success is assured.' And wasn't I prudent? Didn't I keep out of the divisions for half the session? Who's your father's banker, Heathcote?"

"Drummonds, I believe; but I don't know them."

"Murther! but it is hard! five hundred—only five hundred. A real true-hearted patriot, fresh for his work, and without engagements, going for five hundred! I see you feel for me, my dear fellow," cried he, grasping Heathcote's hand. "I hear what your heart is saying this minute: 'O'Shea, old boy, if I had the money, I'd put it in the palm of your hand without the scratch of a pen between us.'"

"I'm not quite so certain I should," muttered the other, half sulkily.

"But I know you better than you know yourself, and I repeat it. You'd say, 'Gorman O'Shea, I'm not the man to see a first-rate fellow lost for a beggarly five hundred. I'd rather be able to say one of these days, "Look at that man on the Woolsack—or, maybe, Chief Justice in the Queen's Bench—well, would you believe it? if I hadn't helped him one morning with a few hundreds, it's maybe in the Serpentine he'd have been, instead of up there."' And as we'd sit over a bottle of hock in the bay-window at Richmond, you'd say, 'Does your Lordship remember the night when you

heard the House was up, and you hadn't as much as would pay your fare over to Ireland?'"

"I'm not so certain of *that* either," was the dry response of Heathcote.

"And of what *are* you certain, then?" cried O'Shea, angrily; "for I begin to believe you trust nothing, nor any one."

"I'll tell you what I believe—and believe firmly, too—which is, that a pair of fellows so completely out at elbows as you and myself, had far better break stones on a high road for a shilling a day than stand cudgelling their wits how to live upon others."

"That is not my sentiment at all—*suum cuique*—stone-breaking to the hard-handed; men of our stamp, Heathcote, have a right—a vested right—to a smoother existence."

"Well, time will tell who is right," said Heathcote, carelessly, as he put on his hat and walked to the door. A half-cold good-bye followed, and they parted.

Hour after hour he walked the streets, unmindful of a thin misty rain that fell unceasingly. He was now completely alone in the world, and there was a sort of melancholy pleasure in the sense of his desolation. "My poor father!" he would mutter from time to time; "if I could only think that he would forget me! if I could but bring myself to believe that after a time he would cease to sorrow for me!" He did not dare to utter more, nor even to himself declare how valueless he deemed life, but strolled listlessly onward, till the grey streaks in the murky sky proclaimed the approach of morning.

Was it with some vague purpose, or was it by mere accident, that he found himself standing at last near the barracks at Knightsbridge, around the gate of which a group of country-looking young fellows was gathered, while here and there a sergeant was seen to hover, as if speculating on his prey? It was a time in which more than one young man of station had enlisted as a private, and the sharp eye of the crimp soon scanned the upright stature and well-knit frame of Heathcote.

"Like to be a dragoon, my man?" said he, with an easy, swaggering air.

"I have some thought of it," said the other, coldly.

"You've served already, I suspect," said the sergeant, in a more respectful tone.

"For what regiment are you enlisting?" asked Heathcote, coldly, disregarding the other's inquiry.

"Her Majesty's Bays—could you ask better? But here's my officer."

Before Heathcote had well heard the words, his name was called out, and a slight, boyish figure threw his arms about him.

"Charley, how glad I am to see you!" cried he.

"Agincourt!—is this you?" said Heathcote, blushing deeply as he spoke.

"Yes, I have had my own way at last; and I'm going to India too."

"I am not," said Heathcote, bitterly. "They'll not have me at the Horse Guards; I am too old, or too something or other for the service, and there's nothing left me but to enter the ranks."

"Oh, Charley," cried the other, "if you only knew of the breaking heart you have left behind you!—if you only knew how *she* loves you!"

Was it that the boyish accents of these few words appealed to Heathcote's heart with all the simple force of truth?—was it that they broke in upon his gloom so unexpectedly—a slanting sun-ray piercing a dark cloud? But so it is, that he turned away, and drew his hand across his eyes.

"I was off for a day's hunting down in Leicestershire," said Agincourt. "I sent the nags away yesterday. Come with me, Charley; we shall be back again to-morrow, and you'll see if my old guardian won't set all straight with the War-Office people for you. Unless," added he, in a half-whisper, "you choose in the meanwhile to put your trust in what I shall tell you, and go back again."

"I only hope that I may do so," said Heathcote, as he wrung the other's hand warmly, "and I'd bless the hour that led me here this morning."

It was soon arranged between them that Agincourt should drive round by Heathcote's lodgings and take him up, when he had packed up a few things for the journey. O'Shea was so sound asleep that he could scarcely be awakened to hear his companion say "good-bye." Some vague, indistinct idea floated before him that Heathcote had fallen upon some good fortune, and, as he shook his hand, he muttered,—

"Go in and win, old fellow; take all you can get, clear the beggars out, that's *my* advice to you." And with these sage counsels he turned on his pillow, and snored away once more.

"Wasn't that Inch-o'-brogue I heard talking to you?" asked Agincourt.

"Yes. The poor fellow, like myself, is sorely hard up just now."

"My old governor must get him something. We'll think of him on our return; so jump in, Charley, or we shall be late for the train."

How contagious was that happy boy's good humour, and how soon did his light-heartedness impart its own quality to Heathcote's spirits. As they whirled along through the brisk fresh air of the morning, the youth recounted all that passed with him since they met—no very great or stirring events were they, it is true, but they were *his*—and they were his first experiences of dawning manhood; and, oh! let any of us, now plodding along wearily on the shady side of life, only bethink us of the joyful sunshine of our youth, when the most commonplace incidents came upon us with freshness, and we gloried in the thought of having a "part," an actual character to play, in that grand drama they call the World.

We would not, if we could, recall his story; we could not hope that our reader would listen as pleasurably as did Heathcote to it; enough that we say they never felt the miles go over, nor, till their journey was ended, had a thought that they were already arrived at their destination.

CHAPTER XXIX.

OLD LETTERS.

The little cottage at Port-na-Whapple, to which Alfred Layton had repaired to collect the last few relics of his poor mother, had so completely satisfied all his longings for quiet seclusion, that he lingered on there in a sort of dreamy abstractedness far from unpleasing. Quackinboss was with him, but never was there a companion less obtrusive. The honest American delighted in the spot; he was a fisherman, and soon became acquainted with all the choice places for the take of salmon, while he oftentimes strolled inland and whipped the mountain streams with no small success. In fact, the gun, the rod, and a well-trained greyhound amply supplied all the demands of the household; and never was there a life less crossed by outward cares than theirs. Whether the colonel believed or not that Layton was deeply engaged in his studies, he affected to think so, and made a point of interfering as little as possible with the other's time. If by a chance word now and then he would advert to their projected trip to America, he never pressed the theme, nor seemed in any way to evince over-eagerness regarding it. Indeed, with a delicacy of truest refinement, he abstained from making Layton ever feel himself constrained by the deep obligations he owed him, so that nothing could be freer than their intercourse; the only theme of gloom between them being the fate of Layton's father, of which, notwithstanding all their efforts, they could obtain no tidings. From the day when he quitted the asylum, and was pronounced "cured," nothing was known of him. Doctor Millar had assisted in all their inquiries with a most friendly interest, and endeavoured to induce Alfred to accept the hospitalities of the vicarage; but this he declined, making weak health his apology. The vicar, however, did not cease to show his constant attention, feeling deeply interested in the youth. In nothing did he evince this sentiment more than the trouble he gave himself to collect the scattered papers and documents of the old Professor. The old man—accustomed ever to an existence of emergency—was in the

habit of pledging his private papers and his own writings for small sums here and there through the country; and thus researches which had cost months of labour, investigations of deepest import, were oftentimes pawned at a public for a few shillings. Scarcely a day went over without some record being brought in by a farmer or a small village tradesman; sometimes valueless, sometimes of great interest. Now and then they would be violent and rebellious pasquinades against men in power—his supposed enemies—versified slanders upon imaginary oppressors.

Neither imbued with Alfred's taste, nor influenced by the ties of blood, Quackinboss took a pleasure in poring over these documents which the young man could not feel. The Professor, to him, seemed the true type of intellectual power, and he had that bold recklessness of all consequences which appealed strongly to the Yankee. He was, as he phrased it, an "all-mighty smasher," and would have been a rare man for Congress! All Alfred's eagerness to possess himself of his father's papers was soon exceeded by the zeal of Quackinboss, who, by degrees, abandoned gun and rod to follow out his new pursuit. If he could not estimate the value of deep scientific calculations and researches, he was fully alive to the sparkling wit and envenomed satire of the various attacks upon individuals; and so enamoured was he of these effusions, that many of the verse ones he had committed to memory.

Poor Alfred! what a struggle was his, as Quackinboss would recite some lines of fearful malignity, asking him the while "if all English literature could show such another 'tarnal screamer' as his own parent? Warn't he a 'right-down scarification?' Didn't he scald the hides of them old hogs in the House of Lords? Well, I'm blest if Mr. Clay could a done it better!" To the young man's mild suggestions that his father's fame would rest upon very different labours, Quackinboss would hastily offer rejoinder, "No, sir, chemicals is all very well, but human natur' is a grander study than acids and oxides. What goes on in a man's heart is a main sight harder reading than salts and sediments."

The colonel had learned in the course of his wanderings that a farmer, who inhabited one of the lone islands off the coast, was in possession of an old writing-desk of the Professor—the pledge for a loan of three pounds sterling—a sum so unusually large as to imply that the property was estimated as of value. It was some time before the weather

admitted of a visit to the spot, but late of a summer's evening, as Alfred sat musingly on the door-sill of the cottage, Quackinboss was seen approaching with an old-fashioned writing-desk under his arm, while he called out, "Here it is; and without knowin' the con-tents, I'd not swap the plunder for a raft of timber!"

If the moment of examining the papers was longed for by the impatient Quackinboss with an almost feverish anxiety, what was his blank disappointment at finding that, instead of being the smart squibs or bitter invectives he delighted in, the whole box was devoted to documents relating to a curious incident in medical jurisprudence, and was labelled on the inner side of the lid, "Hawke's case, with all the tests and other papers."

"This seems to have been a great criminal case," said Alfred, "and it must have deeply interested my father, for he has actually drawn out a narrative of the whole event, and has even journalized his share in the story.

"'Strange scene that I have just left,' wrote he, in a clear, exact hand. 'A man very ill—seriously, dangerously ill—in one room, and a party—his guests—all deeply engaged at play in the same house. No apparent anxiety about his case—scarcely an inquiry; his wife—if she be his wife, for I have my misgivings about it—eager and feverish, following me from place to place, with a sort of irresolute effort to say something which she has no courage for. Patient worse—the case a puzzling one; there is more than delirium tremens here. But what more? that's the question. Remarkable his anxiety about the sense of burning in the throat; ever asking, "Is that usual? is it invariable?" Suspicion of course to be looked for; but why does it not extend to *me* also? Afraid to drink, though his thirst is excruciating. Symptoms all worse—pulse irregular—desires to see me alone—his wife, unwilling, tries by many pretexts to remain; he seems to detect her plan, and bursts into violent passion, swears at her, and cries out, "Ain't you satisfied? Don't you see that I'm dying?"

"'We have been alone for above an hour. He has told me all; she is not his wife, but the divorced wife of a well-known man in office. Believes she intended to leave him; knows, or fancies he knows, her whole project. Rage and anger have increased the bad symptoms, and made him much worse. Great anxiety about the fate of his child, a daughter of his former wife; constantly exclaiming, "They will rob her! they will leave her a beggar, and I have none to protect

her." A violent paroxysm of pain—agonizing pain—has left him very low.

"'"What name do you give this malady, doctor?" he asks me.

"'"It is a gastric inflammation, but not unaccompanied by other symptoms."

"'"How brought on?"

"'"No man can trace these affections to primary causes."

"'"I can—here at least," breaks he in. "This is poison, and *you* know it. Come, sir," he cried, "be frank and honest with one whose moments are to be so few here. Tell me, as you would speak the truth in your last hour, am I not right?"

"'"I cannot say with certainty. There are things here I am unable to account for, and there are traits which I cannot refer to any poisonous agency."

"'"Think over the poisons; you know best. Is it arsenic?"

"'"No, certainly not."

"'"Nor henbane, nor nicotine, nor nitre, nor strychnine —none of these?"

"'"None."

"'"How subtle the dogs have been!" muttered he. "What fools they make of you, with all your science! The commonest money-changer will detect a spurious shilling, but you, with all your learning, are baffled by every counterfeit case that meets you. Examine, sir; inquire, investigate well," he cried; "it is for your honour as a physician not to blunder here."

"'"Be calm; compose yourself. These moments of passion only waste your strength."

"'"Let me drink—no, from the water jug; they surely have not drugged *that!* What are you doing there?"

"'"I was decanting the tea into a small bottle, that I might take it home and test it."

"'"And so," said he, sighing, "with all your boasted skill, it is only after death you can pronounce. It is to aid the law, not to help the living, you come. Be it so. But mind, sir," cried he, with a wild energy, "they are all in it—all. Let none escape. And these were my friends!" said he, with a smile of inexpressible sorrow. "Oh, what friends are a bad man's friends! You swear to me, doctor, if there has been foul play it shall be discovered. They shall swing for it. Don't you screen them. No mumbling, sir; your oath—your solemn sworn oath! Take those keys and open

that drawer there—no, the second one; fetch me the papers. This was my will two months ago," said he, tearing open the seals of an envelope. "You shall see with your own eyes how I meant by her. You will declare to the world how you read in my own hand that I had left her everything that was not Clara's by right. Call her here—send for her—let her be present while you read it aloud, and let her see it burnt afterwards."

"'It was long before I could calm him after this paroxysm. At length he said: "What a guilty conscience will be yours if this crime pass unpunished!"

"'"If there be a crime, it shall not," said I, firmly.

"'"If it were to do," muttered he, in a low voice, "I'd rather they'd have shot me; these agonies are dreadful, and all this lingering too! Oh! could you not hasten it now? But not yet!" cried he, wildly. "I have to tell you about Clara. They may rob her of all here, but she will be rich after all. There is that great tract in America, in Ohio, called 'Peddar's Clearings;' don't forget the name. Peddar's Clearings, all hers; it was her mother's fortune. Harvey Winthrop, in Norfolk, has the titles, and is the guardian when I am dead."'"

"Why, I know that ere tract well; there's a cousin of mine, Obadiah B. Quackinboss, located there, and there ain't finer buckwheat in all the West than is grown on that location. But go on, let's hear about this sick fellow."

"This is an account of chemical tests, all this here," said Alfred, passing over several leaves of the diary. "It seems to have been a difficult investigation, but ending at last in the detection of corrosive sublimate."

"And it killed him?"

"Yes; he died on the third evening after this was written. Here follows the whole story of the inquest, and a remarkable letter, too, signed 'T. Towers.' It is addressed to my father, and marked 'Private and Secret': 'The same' and which delivers you this will put you in possession of five hundred pounds sterling; and, in return, you will do whatever is necessary to make all safe. There is no evidence, except yours, of consequence; and all the phials and botties have been already disposed of. Be cautious, and stand fast to yours,—T. T.' On a slip wafered to this note was written: 'I am without twenty shillings in the world; my shoes are falling to pieces, and my coat threadbare; but I cannot do this.' But what have we here?" cried Alfred, as a neatly folded note with deep black margin met his eyes. It was a short

The Hand-writing.

and most gracefully-worded epistle in a lady's hand, thanking Doctor Layton for his unremitting kindness and perfect delicacy in a season of unexampled suffering. "I cannot," wrote she, "leave the island, dearly associated as it is with days of happiness, and now more painfully attached to my heart by the most terrible of afflictions, without tendering to the kindest of physicians my last words of gratitude." The whole, conveyed in lines of strictly conventional use, gave no evidence of anything beyond a due sense of courtesy, and the rigid observance of a fitting etiquette. It was very polished in style, and elegant in phraseology; but to have been written amid such scenes as she then lived in, it seemed a perfect marvel of unfeeling conduct.

"That 'ere woman riles me con-siderable," said Quackinboss; "she doesn't seem to mind, noways, what has happened, and talks of goin' to a new clearin' quite unconsarned like. I ain't afraid of many things, but I'm darned extensive if I'd not be afeard of her! What are you a-poring over there?"

"It is the handwriting. I am certain I have seen it before; but where, how, and when, I cannot bring to mind."

"How could you, sir? Don't all your womankind write that sort of up-and-down bristly hand, more like a prickly-pear fence than a Christian's writin'? It's all of a piece with your Old-World civilization, which tries to make people alike, as the eggs in a basket; but they ain't like for all that. No, sir, nor will any fixin' make 'em so!"

"I have certainly seen it before," muttered Layton to himself.

"I'm main curious to know how your father found out the 'pyson'—ain't it all there?"

"Oh, it was a long and very intricate chemical investigation."

"Did he bile him?"

"Boil him? no," said he, with difficulty restraining a laugh; "certainly not."

"Well, they tell me, sir, there ain't no other sure way to discover it. They always bile 'em in France!"

"I am so puzzled by this hand," muttered Alfred, half aloud.

Quackinboss, equally deep in his own speculations, proceeded to give an account of the mode of inquiry pursued by Frenchmen of science in cases of poisoning, which certainly would have astonished M. Orfila, and was only brought

back from this learned disquisition by Layton's questioning him about "Peddar's Clearings."

"Yes, sir," said he, "it is con-siderable of a tract, and lies between two rivers. There's the lines for a new city—Pentacolis—laid down there; and the chief town, 'Measles,' is a thriving location. My cousin, O. B. Quackinboss, didn't stump out less than eighty dollars an acre for his clearin', and there's better land than his there."

"So far as appears, then, this is an extensive property which is spoken of here?"

"Well, sir, I expect it's a matter of half a million of dollars now, though, mayhap, twenty thousand bought it fifteen or sixteen years back."

"I wonder what steps my father took in this affair? I'll be very curious to know if he interested himself in the matter, for, with his indolent habits, it is just as likely that he never moved in it further."

"A 'tarnal shame, then, for him, sir, when it was for a child left alone and friendless in the world; and I'm thinkin' indolence ain't the name to give it."

For a moment an angry impulse to reply stirred Layton's blood, but he refrained, and said nothing.

"I'll go further," resumed the American, "and I'll say, that if your father did neglect this duty, you are bound to look to it. Ay, sir, there ain't no ways in this world of getting out of what we owe one to another. We are most of us ready enough to be 'generous,' but few take trouble to be 'just.'"

"I believe you are right," said Layton, reflectively.

"I know it, sir—I know it," said the other, resolutely. "There's a sort of flattery in doing something more than we are obliged to do which never comes of doing what is strict fair. Ay," added he, after a moment, "and I've seen a man who'd jump into the sea to save a fellow-creature as wouldn't give a cent to a starving beggar on dry land."

"I'll certainly inquire after this claim, and you'll help me, Quackinboss?"

"Yes, sir; and there ain't no honester man in all the States to deal with than Harvey Winthrop. I was with him the day he cowhided Senator Jared Boles, of Massachusetts, and when I observed, 'I think you have given him enough,' he said, 'Well, sir, though I haven't the honour of knowing *you*, if that be your conscientious opinion, I'll abstain from going further;' and he did, and we went into the bar together, and had a mint julep."

"The trait is worth remembering," said Layton, dryly. "Here's another reason to cross the Atlantic," cried he, with something of his former energy of voice and look. "Here's a great cause to sustain and a problem to work out. Shall we go at once?"

"There's the *Asia* to sail on Wednesday, and I'm ready," said Quackinboss, calmly.

"Wednesday be it, then," cried Layton, with a gaiety that showed how the mere prospect of activity and exertion had already cheered him.

CHAPTER XXX.

TWIST, TROVER, AND CO.

THEY whose notions of a banker are formed on such home models as Overend, and Gurney, and Drummond, and the other princes o' that ilk, will be probably not a little shocked to learn by what inferior dignitaries the great craft is represented abroad; your English banker in a foreign city being the most extraordinary agglomeration of all trades it is well possible to conceive, combining within himself very commonly the duties of house-agent, wine-merchant, picture-dealer, curiosity-vendor, with agencies for the sale of india-rubber shoes, Cuban cigars, and cod-liver oil. He will, at a moment's notice, start you with a whole establishment from kitchen to stable, and, equally ready to do the honours of this world or the next, he will present you in society, or embalm you with every careful direction for your conveyance "homeward." Well judging that in dealing thus broadly with mankind a variety of tastes and opinions must be consulted, they usually hunt in couples, one doing the serious, the other taking the light comedy parts. The one is the grave, calm, sensible man, with his prudent reserves and his cautious scruples; the other, a careless dog, who only "discounts" out of fun, and charges you "commission" in mere pastime and lightness of heart.

Imagine the heavy father and the light rake of comedy

conspiring for some common object, and you have them. Probably the division-of-labour science never had a happier illustration than is presented by their agreement. Who, I ask you—who can escape the double net thus stretched for his capture? Whatever your taste or temperament, you must surely be approachable by one or the other of these. What Trover cannot, Twist will be certain to accomplish; where Twist fails, there Trover is sovereign. "Ah, you'll have to ask *my* partner about that," is the stereotyped saying of each. It was thus these kings of Brentford sniffed at the same nosegay, the world, and, sooth to say, to their manifest self-satisfaction and profit. If the compact worked well for all the purposes of catching clients, it was more admirable still in the difficult task of avoiding them. Strange and exceptional must his station in life be to whom the secret intelligences of Twist or Trover could not apply. Were we about to dwell on these gentlemen and their characteristics, we might advert to the curious fact that though their common system worked so smoothly and successfully, they each maintained for the other the most disparaging opinion, Twist deeming Trover a light, thoughtless, inconsiderate creature, Trover returning the compliment by regarding his partner as a bigoted, low-minded, vulgar sort of fellow, useful behind the desk, but with no range of speculation or enterprise about him.

Our present scene is laid at Mr. Trover's villa near Florence. It stands on the sunny slope of Fiezole, and with a lovely landscape of the Val d'Arno at its feet. O ye gentles, who love to live at ease, to inhale an air odorous with the jasmine and the orange-flower—to gaze on scenes more beautiful than Claude ever painted—to enjoy days of cloudless brightness, and nights gorgeous in starry brilliancy, why do ye not all come and live at Fiezole? Mr. Trover's villa is now to let, though this announcement is not inserted as an advertisement. There was a rumour that it was once Boccacio's villa. Be that as it may, it was a pretty, coquettish little place, with a long terrace in front, under which ran an orangery, a sweet, cool, shady retreat in the hot noon-time, with a gushing little fountain always rippling and hissing among rock-work. The garden sloped away steeply. It was a sort of wilderness of flowers and fruit-trees, little cared for or tended, but beautiful in the wild luxuriance of its varied foliage, and almost oppressive in its wealth of perfume. Looking over this garden, and beyond it again, catching the distant domes of Florence, the tall tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, and the mas-

sive block of the Pitti, was a small but well-proportioned room whose frescoes were carried from wall to ceiling by a gentle arch of the building, in which were now seated three gentlemen over their dessert. Mr. Trover's guests were our acquaintances Stocmar and Ludlow Paten. The banker and the "Impresario" were very old friends; they had done "no end of shrewd things" together. Paten was a new acquaintance. Introduced, however, by Stocmar, he was at once admitted to all the intimacy of his host, and they sat there, in the free indulgence of confidence, discussing people, characters, events, and probabilities, as three such men, long case-hardened with the world's trials, well versed in its wiles, may be supposed to do. Beneath the great broad surface of this life of ours, with its apparent impulses and motives, there is another stratum of hard stern realities, in which selfish motives and interested actions have their sphere. These gentlemen lived entirely in this layer, and never condescended to allude to what went on elsewhere. If they took a very disparaging view of life, it was not so much the admiration they bestowed on knavery as the hearty contempt they entertained for whatever was generous or trustful. Oh, how they did laugh at the poor "muffs" who believed in anything or any one! To listen to them was to declare that there was not a good trait in the heart, nor an honest sentiment which had not its origin in folly. And the stupid dog who paid his father's debts, and the idiot that beggared himself to portion his sisters, and the wretched creature who was ruined by giving security for his friend, all figured in a category despised and ridiculed!

"Were they happy in this theory?" you ask, perhaps. It is very hard to answer the question. They were undoubtedly what is called "jolly;" they laughed much, and seemed marvellously free from care and anxiety.

"And so, Trover," said Stocmar, as he sipped his claret luxuriously—"and so you tell me this is a bad season with you, out here, few travellers, no residents, and little stirring in the way of discounts and circular notes."

"Wretched! miserable!" cried the banker. "The people who come out from England now-a-days are mostly small twenty-pounders, looking sharp to the exchanges, and watching the quotations like money-brokers."

"Where are the fast men all gone to? that is a problem puzzles me much," said Paten.

"They have gone over to Puseyism and stained glass, and Saint Winifred's shin-bones, and early Christian art," broke

in Stocmar. "I know them well, and their velvet paletots cut in the mediæval fashion, and their hair cut straight over the forehead."

"How slow a place must become with such fellows!" sighed Paten.

"The women are mostly pretty; they dress with a sort of quaint coquetry very attractive, and they have a kind of demure slyness about them, with a fascination all its own."

"We have the exact type you describe here at this moment now," said the banker. "She never goes into society, but steals furtively about the galleries, making copies of old Giottos, and such-like, and even penetrating into the monasteries with a special permission from the Cardinal-Secretary to examine the frescoes."

"Is she young? is she pretty?" asked Stocmar.

"She is both, and a widow, I believe—at least, her letters come to the bank addressed Mrs. Penthony Morris."

Paten started, but a slight kick under the table from Stocmar recalled him to caution and self-possession.

"Tell us more about her, Trover; all that you know, in fact."

"Five words will suffice for that. She lives here with the family of a certain Sir William Heathcote, and apparently exercises no small influence amongst them; at least, the tradespeople tell me they are referred to her for everything, and all the letters we get about transfers of stock, and such-like are in *her* hand."

"You have met her, and spoken with her, I suppose?" asked Stocmar.

"Only once. I waited upon her, at her request, to confer with her about her daughter, whom she had some intention of placing at the Conservatoire at Milan, as a preparation for the stage, and some one had told her that I knew all the details necessary."

"Have you seen the girl?"

"Yes, and heard her sing. Frightened enough she was, poor thing; but she has a voice like Sontag's, just a sort of mellow, rich tone they run upon just now, and with a compass equal to Malibran's."

"And her look?"

"Strikingly handsome. She is very young; her mother says nigh sixteen, but I should guess her at under fifteen certainly. I thought at once of writing to *you*, Stocmar, when I saw her. I know how eagerly *you* snatch up such a chance as this; but as you were on your way out, I deferred to mention her till you came."

"And what counsel did you give her, Trover?"

"I said, 'By all means devote her to the Opera. It is to women, in our age, what the career of politics is to men, the only royal road to high ambition.'"

"That is what I tell all my young prime donne," said Stocmar. "I never fail to remind them that any débûtante may live to be a duchess."

"And they believe you?" asked Paten.

"To be sure they do. Why, man, there is an atmosphere of credulity about a theatre that makes one credit anything, except what is palpably true. Every manager fancies he is making a fortune; every tenor imagines he is to marry a princess; and every fiddler in the orchestra firmly believes in the time when a breathless audience will be listening to *his* 'solo.'"

"I wish, with all my heart, I was on the stage, then," exclaimed Paten. "I should certainly like to imbibe some of this sanguine spirit."

"You are too old a dram-drinker, Ludlow, to be intoxicated with such light tipple," said Stocmar. "You have tasted of the real 'tap.'"

"That have I," said he, with a sigh that told how intensely he felt the words; and then, as if to overcome the sad impression, he asked, "And the girl, is she to take to the stage?"

"I believe Stocmar will have to decide the point; at least, I told her mother that he was on his way to Italy, and that his opinion on such a matter might be deemed final. Our friend here," continued Trover, as he pointed laughingly to Stocmar—"our friend here buys up these budding celebrities just as Anderson would a yearling colt, and, like him, too, would reckon himself well paid if one succeed in twenty."

"Ay, one in fifty, Trover," broke in Stocmar. "It is quite true. Many a stone does not pay for the cutting, but as we always get the lot cheap, we can afford to stand the risk."

"She's a strange sort of woman, this Mrs. Morris," said Trover, after a pause, "for she seems hesitating between the Conservatoire and a convent."

"Is the girl a Catholic?"

"No; but her mother appears to consider that as a minor circumstance; in fact, she strikes me as one of those people who, when they determine to go to a place, are certain to cut out a road for themselves."

"That she is!" exclaimed Paten.

"Oh, then, you are acquainted with her?" cried Trover.

"No, no," said he, hurriedly. "I was merely judging from your description of her. Such a woman as you have pictured I can imagine, just as if I had known her all my life."

"I should like to see both mother and daughter," broke in Stocmar.

"I fancy she will have no objection; at least, she said to me, 'You will not fail to inform me of your friend Mr. Stocmar's arrival here;' and I promised as much."

"Well, you must arrange our meeting speedily, Trover, for I mean to be at Naples next week, at Barcelona and Madrid the week after. The worthy Public, for whose pleasure I provide, will, above all things, have novelty—excellence, if you can, but novelty must be procured them."

"Leave it to me, and you shall have an interview to-morrow or the day after."

A strange telegraphic intelligence seemed to pass from Paten to the manager, for Stocmar quickly said, "By the way, don't drop any hint that Paten is with me: he hasn't got the best of reputations behind the scenes, and it would, perhaps, mar all our arrangements to mention him."

Trover put a finger to his lips in sign of secrecy, and said, "You are right there. She repeatedly questioned me on the score of your own morality, Stocmar, expressing great misgivings about theatrical folk generally."

"Take my word for it, then, the lady is a fast one herself," said Stocmar, "for, like the virtuous Pangloss, she knows what wickedness is."

"It is deuced hard to say what she is," broke in Trover. "My partner, Twist, declares she must have been a stock-broker, or a notary public. She knows the whole share-list of Europe, and can quote you the 'price current' of every security in the Old World or the New; not to say that she is deeply versed in all the wily relations between the course of politics and the exchanges, and can surmise, to a nicety, how every spoken word of a minister can react upon the money-market."

"She cannot have much to do with such interests, I take it," said Paten, in assumed indifference.

"Not upon her own account, certainly," replied Trover; "but such is her influence over this old baronet, that she persuades him to sell out here, and buy in there, just as the mood inclines her."

"And is he so very rich?" asked Stocmar.

"Twist thinks not; he suspects that the money all belongs

to a certain Miss Leslie, the ward of Sir William, but who came of age a short time back."

"Now, what may her fortune be?" said Stocmar, in a careless tone; "in round numbers, I mean, and not caring for a few thousands more or less."

"I have no means of knowing. I can only guess it must be very large. It was only on Tuesday last she bought in about seven-and-twenty thousand 'Arkansas New Bonds,' and we have an order this morning to transfer thirty-two thousand more into Illinois 'Sevens.'"

"All going to America!" cried Paten. "Why does she select investment there?"

"That's the widow's doing. She says that the Old World is going in for a grand smash. That Louis Napoleon will soon have to throw off the mask, and either avow himself the head of the democracy, or brave its vengeance, and that either declaration will be the signal for a great war. Then she assumes that Austria, pushed hard for means to carry on the struggle, will lay hands on the Church property of the empire, and in this way outrage all the nobles whose families were pensioned off on these resources, thus of necessity throwing herself on the side of the people. In a word, she looks for revolution, convulsion, and a wide-spread ruin, and says the Yankees are the only people who will escape. I know little or nothing of such matters myself, but she sent Twist home t'other day in such a state of alarm that he telegraphed to Turin to transfer all his 'Sardinians' into 'New Yorkers,' and has been seriously thinking of establishing himself in Broadway."

"I wish she'd favour me with her views about theatrical property," said Stocmar, with a half sneer, "and what is to become of the Grand Opera in the grand smash."

"Ask her, and she'll tell you," cried Trover. "You'll never pose her with a difficulty; she'll give you a plan for paying off the national debt, tell you how to recruit the finances of India, conduct the Chinese war, or oppose French intrigues in Turkey, while she stitches away at her Berlin work. I give you my word, while she was finishing off the end of an elephant's snout in brown worsted, t'other day, she restored the Murats to Naples, gave Sicily to Russia, and sent the Pope, as head of a convict establishment, to Cayenne."

"Is she a little touched in the upper story?" asked Stocmar, laying his finger on his forehead.

"Twist says not. Twist calls her the wiliest serpent he ever saw, but not mad."

"And now a word about the daughter," cried Stocmar. "What's the girl like?"

"Pretty—very pretty; long eyelashes, very regular features, a beautiful figure, and the richest auburn hair I ever saw· but, with all that, none of the mother's *esprit*—no smartness, no brilliancy. In fact, I should call her a regular mope."

"She is very young, remember,' broke in Stocmar.

"That's true; but with such a clever mother, if she really had any smartness, it would certainly show itself. Now, it is not only that she displays no evidence of superior mind, but she wears an air of depression and melancholy that seems like a sort of confession of her own insufficiency, so Twist says, and Twist is very shrewd as to character."

"I can answer for it, he's devilish close-fisted as to money," said Stocmar, laughing.

"I remember," chimed in Trover; "he told me that you came into the bank with such a swaggering air, and had such a profusion of gold chains, rings, and watch-trinkets, that he set you down for one of the swell-mob out on a tour."

"Civil, certainly," said Stocmar, "but as little flattering to his own perspicuity as to myself. But I'll never forget the paternal tone in which he whispered me afterwards, 'Whenever you want a discount, Mr. Stocmar, from a stranger—an utter stranger—don't wear an opal pin set in brilliants; it don't do, I assure you it don't.'" Stocmar gave such a close imitation of the worthy banker's voice and utterance, that his partner laughed heartily.

"Does he ever give a dinner, Trover?" asked Stocmar.

"Oh yes, he gives one every quarter. Our graver clients, who would not venture to come up here, dine with him, and he treats them to sirloins and saddles, with Gordon's sherry and a very fruity port, made especially, I believe, for men with good balances to their names."

"I should like to be present at one of these festivals."

"You have no chance, Stocmar; he'd as soon think of inviting the *corps de ballet* to tea. I myself am never admitted to such celebrations."

"What rogues these fellows are, Ludlow!" said Stocmar. "If you and I were to treat the world in this fashion, what would be said of us! The real humbugs of this life are the fellows that play the heavy parts." And with this reflection, whose image was derived from his theatrical experiences, he arose, to take his coffee on the terrace.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE TOILS.

Mrs. Morris gave directions that when a gentleman should call to inquire for her he should be at once introduced, a brief note from Mr. Trover having apprised her that Mr. Stocmar had just arrived, and would wait upon her without further delay. There was not in her air or manner the slightest trait of inquietude or even impatience; as she sat there, still stitching away at her Berlin elephant, she seemed an emblem of calm, peaceful contentedness. Her half-mourning, perhaps, sobered down somewhat the character of her appearance, but these lilac-coloured ribbons harmonized well with her fair skin, and became her much.

With a tact all her own, she had carefully avoided in the arrangement of her room any of those little artistic effects which, however successful with the uninitiated, would be certain of a significant appreciation from one familiar with stage "get up" and all the suggestive accessories of the playhouse. "No," thought she—"no half-open miniatures, no moss-roses in Bohemian glass—not even a camellia—on my work-table for Mr. Stocmar." Even Lila, her Italian greyhound, was dismissed from her accustomed cushion on that morning, lest her presence might argue effect.

She knew well that such men as Stocmar have a sort of instinctive appreciation of a locality, and she determined he should have the fewest possible aids to his interpretation of herself. If, at certain moments, a terrible dread would cross her mind that this man might know all her history, who she was, and in what events mixed up, she rallied quickly from these fears by recalling how safe from all discovery she had lived for several years back. Indeed, personally, she was scarcely known at all, her early married life having been passed in almost entire reclusion; while, later on, her few acquaintances were the mere knot of men in Hawke's intimacy. There was also another reflection that supplied its consolation: the Stocmars of this world are a race familiar with secrets; their whole existence is passed

in hearing and treasuring up stories in which honour, fame, and all future happiness are often involved; they are a sort of lay priesthood to the "fast" world, trusted, consulted, and confided in on all sides. "If he should know me," thought she, "it is only to make a friend of him, and no danger can come from that quarter." Trover's note said, "Mr. Stocmar places his services at your feet, too proud if in any way they can be useful to you;" a mere phrase, after all, which might mean much or little, as it might be. At the same time she bore in mind that such men as Stocmar were as little addicted to rash pledges as Cabinet ministers. Too much harassed and worried by solicitation, they usually screened themselves in polite generalities, and never incurred the embarrassment of promising anything, so that, thus viewed, perhaps, he might be supposed as well-intentioned towards her.

Let us for a moment—a mere moment—turn to Stocmar himself, as he walked up and down a short garden alley of Trover's garden with Paten by his side.

"Above all things, remember, Stocmar, believe nothing she tells you, if she only tell it earnestly. Any little truth she utters will drop out unconsciously, never with asseveration."

"I'm prepared for that," replied he, curtly.

"She'll try it on, too, with fifty little feminine tricks and graces; and although you may fancy you know the whole armoury, *pardi!* she has weapons you never dreamed of."

"Possibly," was the only rejoinder.

"Once for all," said Paten—and there was impatience in his tone—"I tell you she is a greater actress than any of your tragedy queens behind the footlights."

"Don't you know what Talleyrand said to the Emperor, Ludlow? 'I think your Majesty may safely rely upon me for the rogueries.'"

Paten shook his head dissentingly; he was very far from feeling the combat an equal one.

Stocmar, however, reminded him that his visit was to be a mere reconnaissance of the enemy, which under no circumstances was to become a battle. "I am about to wait upon her with reference to a daughter she has some thoughts of devoting to the stage—*voilà tout!* I never heard of *you* in my life—never heard of *her*—know absolutely nothing of her history, save by that line in the *Times* newspaper some six weeks ago, which recorded the death of Captain Penthony Morris, by fever, in Upper India."

"That will do—keep to that," cried Paten more cheerfully, as he shook his friend's hand and said good-bye.

Your shrewd men of the world seldom like to be told that any circumstance can arise which may put their acuteness to the test; they rather like to believe themselves always prepared for every call upon their astuteness. Stocmar, therefore, set out in a half-irritation, which it took the three miles of his drive to subdue.

"Mrs. Penthony Morris at home?" asked he of the discreet-looking English servant whom Sir William's home prejudices justly preferred to the mongrel and mustachioed domestics of native breed.

"At home for Mr. Stocmar, sir," said the man, half inquiring, as he bowed deferentially, and then led the way upstairs.

When Stocmar entered the room he was somewhat disappointed. Whether it was that he expected to see something more stately, haughty, and majestic, like Mrs. Siddons herself, or that he counted upon being received with a certain show of warmth and welcome, but the lady before him was slight, almost girlish in figure, blushed a little when he addressed her, and, indeed, seemed to feel the meeting as awkward a thing as need be.

"I have to thank you very gratefully, sir," began she, for condescending to spare me a small portion of time so valuable as yours. Mr. Trover says your stay here will be very brief."

"Saturday, if I must, Friday, if I can, will be the limit, madam," said he, coldly.

"Indeed!" exclaimed she. "I was scarcely prepared for so short a visit; but I am aware how manifold must be your engagements."

"Yes, madam. Even these seasons, which to the world are times of recreation and amusement, are, in reality, to us, periods of active business occupation. Only yesterday I heard a barytone before breakfast, listened to the grand chorus in the 'Huguenots' in my bath, while I decided on the merits of a ballerina as I sat under the hands of my barber."

"And, I venture to say, liked it all," said she, with an outbreak of frank enjoyment in his description.

"Upon my life I believe you are right," said he. "One gets a zest for a pursuit till everything else appears valueless save the one object; and, for my own part, I acknowledge I have the same pride in the success of my new tenor, or my

prima donna, as though I had my share in the gifts which secure it."

"I can fancy all that," said she, in a low, soft voice. And then, stealing a look of half admiration at her visitor, she dropped her eyes again suddenly, with a slight show of confusion.—

"I assure you," continued he, with warmth, "the season I brought out Cianchettoni, whenever he sang a little huskily I used to tell my friends I was suffering with a sore-throat."

"What a deal of sympathy it betrays in your nature!" said she, with a bewitching smile. "And talking of sore-throats, don't sit there in the draught, but take this chair, here." And she pointed to one at her side.

As Stocmar obeyed, he was struck by the beauty of her profile. It was singularly regular, and more youthful in expression than her full face. He was so conscious of having looked at her admiringly, that he hastened to cover the awkwardness of the moment by plunging at once into the question of business. "Trover has informed me, madam," began he, "as to the circumstances in which my very humble services can be made available to you. He tells me that you have a daughter——"

"Not a daughter, sir," interrupted she, in a low, confidential voice, "a niece—the daughter of a sister now no more."

The agitation the words cost her increased Stocmar's confusion, as though he had evidently opened a subject of family affliction. Yes, her handkerchief was to her eyes, and her shoulders heaved convulsively. "Mr. Stocmar," said she, with an effort which seemed to cost her deeply, "though we meet for the first time, I am no stranger to your character. I know your generosity, and your high sense of honour. I am well aware how persons of the highest station are accustomed to confide in your integrity, and in that secrecy which is the greatest test of integrity. I, a poor friendless woman, have no claim to prefer to your regard, except in the story of my misfortunes, and which, in compassion to myself, I will spare you. If, however, you are willing to befriend me on trust—that is, on the faith that I am one not undeserving of your generosity, and entitled at some future day to justify my appeal to it—if, I say, you be ready and willing for this, say so, and relieve my intense anxiety; or if——"

"Madam!" broke he in, warmly, "do not agitate yourself any more. I pledge myself to be your friend."

With a bound she started from her seat, and, seizing his hand, pressed it to her lips, and then, as though overcome by

the boldness of the action, she covered her face and sobbed bitterly. If Stocmar muttered some unmeaning commonplaces of comfort and consolation, he was in reality far more engrossed by contemplating a foot and ankle of matchless beauty, and which, in a moment so unguarded, had become accidentally exposed to view.

"I am, then, to regard you as my friend?" said she, trying to smile through her tears, while she bent on him a look of softest meaning. She did not, however, prolong a situation so critical, but at once, and with an impetuosity that bespoke her intense anxiety, burst out into the story of her actual calamities. Never was there a narrative more difficult to follow; broken at one moment by bursts of sorrow, heart-rending regrets, or scarce less poignant expressions of a resignation that savoured of despair. There had been something very dreadful, and somebody had been terribly cruel, and the world—cold-hearted and unkind as it is—had been even unkinder than usual. And then she was too proud to stoop to this, or accept that. "You surely would not have wished me to?" cried she, looking into his eyes very meltingly. And then there was a loss of fortune somehow, and somewhere; a story within a story, like a Chinese puzzle. And there was more cruelty from the world, and more courage on her part; and then there were years of such suffering—years that had so changed her. "Ah! Mr. Stocmar, you wouldn't know me if you had seen me in those days!" Then there came another bewitching glance from beneath her long eyelashes, as with a half-sigh she said, "You now know it all, and why my poor Clara must adopt the stage, for I have concealed nothing from you—nothing!"

"I am to conclude, then, madam," said he, "that the young lady herself has chosen this career?"

"Nothing of the kind, my dear Mr. Stocmar. I don't think she ever read a play in her life; she has certainly never seen one. Of the stage, and its ambitions and triumphs, she has not the very vaguest notion, nor do I believe, if she had, would anything in the world induce her to adopt it."

"This is very strange; I am afraid I scarcely understand you," broke he in.

"Very probably not, sir; but I will endeavour to explain my meaning. From the circumstances I narrated to you a while ago, and from others which it is unnecessary for me to enter upon, I have arrived at the conclusion that Clara and I must separate. She has reached an age in which either her admissions or her inquiries might prove compromising. My

object would, therefore, be to part with her in such a manner as might exclude our meeting again, and my plan was to enter her as a pupil at the Conservatoire, either at Bologna or Milan, having first selected some one who would assume the office of her guardian, as it were, replacing me in my authority over her. If her talents and acquirements were such as to suit the stage, I trusted to the effect of time and the influence of companionship to reconcile her to the project."

"And may I ask, madam, have you selected the person to whom this precious treasure is to be confided?—the guardian, I mean."

"I have seen him and spoken with him, sir, but have not yet asked his acceptance of the trust."

"Shall I be deemed indiscreet if I inquire his name?"

"By no means, sir. He is a gentleman of well-known character and repute, and he is called—Mr. Stocmar."

"Surely, madam, you cannot mean *me?*" cried he, with a start.

"No other, sir. Had I the whole range of mankind to choose from, you would be the man; you embrace within yourself all the conditions the project requires; you possess all the special knowledge of the subject; you are a man of the world fully competent to decide what should be done, and how; you have the character of being one no stranger to generous motives, and you can combine a noble action with, of course, a very inadequate, but still some personal, advantage. This young lady will, in short, be yours, and if her successes can be inferred from her abilities, the bribe is not despicable."

"Let us be explicit and clear," said Stocmar, drawing his chair closer to her, and talking in a dry, business-like tone. "You mean to constitute me as the sole guide and director of this young lady, with full power to direct her studies, and, so to say, arbitrate for her future in life."

"Exactly," was the calm reply.

"And what am I to give in return, madam? What is to be the price of such an unlooked-for benefit?"

"Secrecy, sir—inviolable secrecy—your solemnly-sworn pledge that the compact between us will never be divulged to any, even your dearest friend. When Clara leaves me, you will bind yourself that she is never to be traced to me—that no clue shall ever be found to connect us one with the other. With another name who is to know her?"

Stocmar gazed steadfastly at her. Was it that in a moment of forgetfulness she had suffered herself to speak too frankly,

for her features had now assumed a look of almost sternness, the very opposite to their expression hitherto.

"And can you part with your niece so easily as this, madam?" asked he.

"She is not my niece, sir," broke she in with impetuosity; "we are on honour here, and so I tell you she is nothing—less than nothing—to me. An unhappy event—a terrible calamity—bound up our lot for years together. It is a compact we are each weary of, and I have long told her that I only await the arrival of her guardian to relieve myself of a charge which brings no pleasure to either of us."

"You have given me a right to be very candid with you, madam," said Stocmar. "May I adventure so far as to ask what necessity there can possibly exist for such a separation as this you now contemplate?"

"You are evidently resolved, sir, to avail yourself of your privilege," said she, with a slight irritation of manner; "but when people incur a debt, they must compound for being dunned. You desire to know why I wish to part with this girl? I will tell you. I mean to cut off all connection with the past; and she belongs to it. I mean to carry with me no memories of *that* time; and she is one of them. I mean to disassociate myself from whatever might suggest a gloomy retrospect; and this her presence does continually. Perhaps, too, I have other plans—plans so personal that your good breeding and good taste would not permit you to penetrate."

Though the sarcasm in which these last words were uttered was of the faintest, Stocmar felt it, and blushed slightly as he said, "You do me but justice, madam. I would not presume so far! Now, as to the question itself," said he, after a pause, "it is one requiring some time for thought and reflection."

"Which is what it does not admit of, sir," broke she in. "It was on Mr. Trover's assurance that you were one of those who at once can trust themselves to say 'I will,' or 'I will not,' that I determined to see you. If the suddenness of the demand be the occasion of any momentary inconvenience as to the expense, I ought to mention that she is entitled to a few hundred pounds—less, I think, than five—which, of course, could be forthcoming."

"A small consideration, certainly, madam," said he, bowing, "but not to be overlooked." He arose and walked the room, as though deep in thought; at last, halting before her chair, and fixing a steady but not disrespectful gaze on her, he said, "I have but one difficulty in this affair, madam, but yet it is one which I know not how to surmount."

"State it, sir," said she, calmly.

"It is this, madam: in the most unhappy newness of our acquaintance I am ignorant of many things which, however anxious to know, I have no distinct right to ask, so that I stand between the perils of my ignorance and the greater perils of possible presumption."

"I declare to you frankly, sir, I cannot guess to what you allude. If I only surmised what these matters were, I might possibly anticipate your desire to hear them."

"May I dare, then, to be more explicit?" asked he, half timidly.

"It is for you, sir, to decide upon that," said she, with some haughtiness.

"Well, madam," said he, boldly, "I want to know are you a widow?"

"Yes, sir," said she, with a calm composure.

"Am I, then, to believe that you can act free and uncontrolled, without fear of any dictation or interference from others?"

"Of course, sir."

"I mean, in short, madam, that none can gainsay any rights you exercise, or revoke any acts you execute?"

"Really, sir, I cannot fancy any other condition of existence, except it be to persons confined in an asylum."

"Nay, madam, you are wrong there," said he, smiling; "the life of every one is a network of obligations and ties, not a whit the less binding that they are not engrossed on parchment, and attested by three witnesses; liberty to do this, or to omit that, having always some penalty as a consequence."

"Oh, sir, spare me these beautiful moralizings, which only confuse my poor weak woman's head, and just say how they address themselves to me."

"Thus far, madam: that your right over the young lady cannot be contested, nor shared?"

"Certainly not. It is with me to decide for her."

"When, with your permission, I have seen her and spoken with her, if I find that no obstacle presents itself, why then, madam, I accept the charge——"

"And are her guardian," broke she in. "Remember, it is in that character that you assume your right over her. I need not tell a person of such tact as yours how necessary it will be to reply cautiously and guardedly to all inquiries, from whatever quarter coming, nor how prudent it will be to take her away at once from this."

"I will make arrangements this very day. I will telegraph to Milan at once," said he.

"Oh dear!" sighed she, "what a moment of relief is this, after such a long, long period of care and anxiety!"

The great sense of relief implied in these words scarcely seemed to have extended itself to Mr. Stocmar, who walked up and down the room in a state of the deepest preoccupation.

"I wish sincerely," said he, half in soliloquy—"I wish sincerely we had a little more time for deliberation here—that we were not so hurried—that, in short, we had leisure to examine this project more fully, and at length."

"My dear Mr. Stocmar," said she, blandly, looking up from the embroidery that she had just resumed, "life is not a very fascinating thing, taken at its best; but what a dreary affair it would be if one were to stop every instant and canvass every possible, or impossible, eventuality of the morrow. Do what we will, how plain is it that we can prejudge nothing—foresee nothing!"

"Reasonable precautions, madam, are surely permissible. I was just imagining to myself what my position would be if, when this young lady had developed great dramatic ability and every requirement for theatrical success, some relative—some fiftieth cousin if you like, but some one with claim of kindred—should step forward and demand her. What becomes of all my rights in such a case?"

"Let me put another issue, sir. Let me suppose somebody arriving at Dover, or Folkestone, calling himself Charles Stuart, and averring that, as the legitimate descendant of that House, he was the rightful King of England. Do you really believe that Her Majesty would immediately place Windsor at his disposal? or don't you sincerely suppose that the complicated question would be solved by the nearest policeman?"

"But she might marry, madam?"

"With her guardian's consent, of course," said she, with a demure coquetry of look and manner. "I trust she has been too well brought up, Mr. Stocmar, to make any risk of disobedience possible."

"Yes, yes," muttered he, half impatiently, "it's all very well to talk of guardians' consent; but so long as she can say, 'How did you become my guardian? What authority made you such? When, where, and by whom conferred?'——"

"My dear Mr. Stocmar, your ingenuity has conjured up an Equity lawyer instead of an artless girl not sixteen years

of age! Do, pray, explain to me how, with a mind so prone to anticipate difficulties, and so rife to coin objections—how, in the name of all that is wonderful, do you ever get through the immense mass of complicated affairs your theatrical life must present? If, before you engage a prima donna, you are obliged to trace her parentage through three generations back, to scrutinize her baptismal registry and her mother's marriage certificate, all I can say is, that a prime minister's duties must be light holiday work compared with the cares of *your* lot."

"My investigations are not carried exactly so far as you have depicted them," said he, good-humouredly; "but, surely, I'm not too exacting if I say I should like some guarantee——"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Stocmar," said she, interrupting him with a laugh, "but may I ask if you are married?"

"No, madam. I am a bachelor."

"You probably intend, however, at some future time to change your state. I'm certain you don't mean to pass all your life in the egotism of celibacy."

"Possibly not, madam. I will not say that I am beyond the age of being fascinated, or being foolish."

"Just what I mean, sir. Well, surely, in such a contingency, you'd not require the lady to give you what you have just called a guarantee that she'd not run away from you?"

"My trust in her would be that guarantee, madam."

"Extend the same benevolent sentiment to *me*, sir. *Trust* me. I ask for no more." And she said this with a witchery of look and manner that made Mr. Stocmar feel very happy, and very miserable, twice over, within the space of a single minute.

Poor Mr. Stocmar, what has become of all your caution, all your craft, and all the counsels so lately given you? Where are they now? Where is that armour of distrust in which you were to resist the barbed arrow of the enchantress? Trust her! It was not to be thought of, and yet it was exactly the very thing to be done, in spite of all thought, and in defiance of all reason.

And so the *Stocmar* three-decker struck her flag, and the ensign of the fast frigate floated from her masthead!

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DRIVE ROUND THE CASCINE AT FLORENCE.

"HERE's another note for you, Stocmar," said Paten, half peevishly, as they both sat at breakfast at the Hôtel d'Italie, and the waiter entered with a letter. "That's the third from her this morning."

"The second—only the second, on honour," said he, breaking the seal, and running his eye over the contents. "It seems she cannot see me to-day. The Heathcote family are all in grief and confusion; some smash in America has involved them in heavy loss. Trover, you may remember, was in a fright about it last night. She'll meet me, however, at the masked ball to-night, where we can confer together. She's to steal out unperceived, and I'm to recognize her by a yellow domino with a little tricolored cross on the sleeve. Don't be jealous, Ludlow, though it does look suspicious."

"Jealous! I should think not," said the other, insolently.

"Come, come, you'll not pretend to say she isn't worth it, Ludlow, nor you'll not affect to be indifferent to her."

"I wish to Heaven I *was* indifferent to her; next to having never met her, it would be the best thing I know of," said he, rising, and walking the room with hurried steps. "I tell you, Stocmar, if ever there was an evil destiny, I believe that woman to be mine. I don't think I love her, I cannot say to my own heart that I do, and yet there she is, mistress of my fate, to make me or mar me, just as she pleases."

"Which means, simply, that you are madly in love with her," said Stocmar.

"No such thing; I'd do far more to injure than to serve her this minute. If I never closed my eyes last night, it was plotting how to overreach her—how I should wreck her whole fortune in life, and leave her as destitute as I am myself."

"The sentiment is certainly amiable," said Stocmar, smiling.

"I make no pretence to generosity about her," said Paten, sternly; "nor is it between men like you and myself fine sentiments are bandied."

"Fine sentiments are one thing, master, an unreasonable

antipathy is another," said Stocmar. "And it would certainly be too hard if we were to pursue with our hatred every woman that could not love us."

"She *did* love me once—at least, she said so," broke in Paten.

"Be grateful, therefore, for the past. I know *I*'d be very much her debtor for any show of present tenderness, and give it under my hand never to bear the slightest malice whenever it pleased her to change her mind."

"By Heaven! Stocmar," cried Paten, passionately, "I begin to believe you have been playing me false all this time, telling her all about me, and only thinking of how to advance your own interests with her."

"You wrong me, egregiously, then," said Stocmar, calmly. "I am ready to pledge you my word of honour that I never uttered your name, nor made a single allusion to you in any way. Will that satisfy you?"

"It ought," muttered he, gloomily; "but suspicions and distrusts spring up in a mind like mine just as weeds do in a rank soil. Don't be angry with me, old fellow."

"I'm not angry with you, Ludlow, except in so far as you wrong yourself. Why, my dear boy, the pursuit of a foolish spite is like going after a bad debt. All the mischief you could possibly wish this poor woman could never repay *you*."

"How can *you* know that without feeling as I feel?" retorted he, bitterly. "If I were to show you her letters," began he; and then, as if ashamed of his ignoble menace, he stopped and was silent.

"Why not think seriously of this heiress she speaks of? I saw her yesterday as she came back from riding; her carriage was awaiting her at the Piazza del Popolo, and there was actually a little crowd gathered to see her alight."

"Is she so handsome, then?" asked he, half listlessly.

"She is beautiful; I doubt if I ever saw as lovely a face or as graceful a figure."

"I'll wager my head on't, Loo is handsomer; I'll engage to thrust my hand into the fire if Loo's foot is not infinitely more beautiful."

"She has a wonderfully handsome foot, indeed," muttered Stocmar.

"And so you have seen it," said Paten, sarcastically. "I wish you'd be frank with me, and say how far the flirtation went between you."

"Not half so far as I wished it, my boy. That's all the satisfaction you'll get from me."

This was said with a certain irritation of manner that for a while imposed silence upon each.

"Have you got a cheroot?" asked Paten, after a while; and the other flung his cigar-case across the table without speaking.

"I ordered that fellow in Geneva to send me two thousand," said Paten, laughing; "but I begin to suspect he had exactly as many reasons for not executing the order."

"Marry that girl, Ludlow, and you'll get your 'bacco, I promise you," said Stocmar, gaily.

"That's all easy talking, my good fellow, but these things require time, opportunity, and pursuit. Now, who's to ensure me that they'd not find out all about *me*, in the meanwhile? A woman doesn't marry a man with as little solicitation as she waltzes with him, and people in real life don't contract matrimony as they do in the third act of a comic opera."

"Faith, as regards obstacles, I back the stage to have the worst of it," broke in Stocmar. "But whose cab is this in such tremendous haste—Trover's? And coming up here, too? What's in the wind now?"

He had but finished these words when Trover rushed into the room, his face pale as death, and his lips colourless.

"What's up?—what's the matter, man?" cried Stocmar.

"Ruin's the matter—a general smash in America—all securities discredited—bills dishonoured—and universal failure."

"So much the worse for the Yankees," said Paten, lighting his cigar coolly.

A look of anger and insufferable contempt was all Trover's reply.

"Are you deep with them?" asked Stocmar, in a whisper to the banker.

"Over head and ears," muttered the other; "we have been discounting their paper freely all through the winter, till our drawers are choke-full of their acceptances, not one of which would now realize a dollar."

"How did the news come? Are you sure of its being authentic?"

"Too sure; it came in a despatch to Mrs. Morris from London. All the investments she has been making lately for the Heathcotes are clean swept away; a matter of sixty thousand pounds not worth as many penny-pieces."

"The fortune of Miss Leslie?" asked Stocmar.

"Yes; she can stand it, I fancy, but it's a heavy blow, too."

"Has she heard the news yet?"

"No, nor Sir William either. The widow cautioned me strictly not to say a word about it. Of course, it will be all over the city in an hour or so, from other sources."

"What do you mean to do, then?"

"Twist is trying to convert some of our paper into cash, at a heavy sacrifice. If he succeed, we can stand it; if not, we must bolt to-night." He paused for a few seconds, and then, in a lower whisper, said, "Isn't she game, that widow? What do you think she said? 'This is mere panic, Trover,' said she; 'it's a Yankee roguery, and nothing more. If I could command a hundred thousand pounds this minute, I'd invest every shilling of it in their paper; and if May Leslie will let me, you'll see whether I'll be true to my word.'"

"It's easy enough to play a bold game on one's neighbour's money," said Stocmar.

"She'd have the same pluck if it were her own, or I mistake her much. Has *he* got any disposable cash?" whispered Trover, with a jerk of his thumb towards Paten.

"Not a sixpence in the world."

"What a situation!" said Trover, in a whisper, trembling with agitation. "Oh, there's Heathcote's brougham—stopping here, too! See! that's Mrs. Morris, giving some directions to the servant. She wants to see you, I'm sure."

Stocmar, making a sign to Trover to keep Paten in conversation, hurried from the room just in time to meet the footman in the corridor. It was as the banker supposed, a request that Mr. Stocmar would favour her with "one minute" at the door. She lifted her veil as he came up to the window of the carriage, and in her sweetest of accents said,—

"Can you take a turn with me? I want to speak to you."

He was speedily beside her, and away they drove, the coachman having received orders to make one turn of the Cascine, and back to the hotel.

"I'm deep in affairs this morning, my dear Mr. Stocmar," began she, as they drove rapidly along, "and have to bespeak your kind aid to befriend me. You have not seen Clara yet, and consequently are unable to pronounce upon her merits in any way, but events have occurred which require that she should be immediately provided for. Could you, by any possibility, assume the charge of her to-day—this evening? I mean, so far as to convey her to Milan, and place her at the Conservatoire."

"But, my dear Mrs. Morris, there is an arrangement to be fulfilled—there is a preliminary to be settled. No young

ladies are received there without certain stipulations made and complied with."

"All have been provided for; she is admitted as the ward of Mr. Stocmar. Here is the document, and here the amount of the first half-year's pension."

"'Clara Stocmar,'" read he. "Well, I must say, madam, this is going rather far."

"You shall not be ashamed of your niece, sir," said she, "or else I mistake greatly your feeling for her aunt." Oh! Mr. Stocmar, how is it that all your behind-scene experiences have not hardened you against such a glance as that which has now set your heart a-beating within that embroidered waistcoat? "My dear Mr. Stocmar," she went on, "if the world has taught me any lesson, it has been to know, by an instinct that never deceives, the men I can dare to confide in. You had not crossed the room where I received you, till I felt you to be such. I said to myself, 'Here is one who will not want to make love to me, who will not break out into wild rhapsodies of passion and professions, but who will at once understand that I need his friendship and his counsel, and that——'" Here she dropped her eyes, and gently suffering her hand to touch his, muttered, "and that I can estimate their value, and try to repay it." Poor Mr. Stocmar, your breathing is more flurried than ever. So agitated, indeed, was he, that it was some seconds ere he became conscious that she had entered upon a narrative for which she had bespoken his attention, and whose details he only caught some time after their commencement. "You thus perceive, sir," said she, "the great importance of time in this affair. Sir William is confined to his room with gout, in considerable pain, and, naturally enough, far too much engrossed by his sufferings to think of anything else; Miss Leslie has her own preoccupations, and, though the loss of a large sum of money may not much increase them, the disaster will certainly serve to engage her attention. This is precisely the moment to get rid of Clara with the least possible *éclat;* we shall all be in such a state of confusion, that her departure will scarcely be felt or noticed."

"Upon my life, madam," said Stocmar, drawing a long breath, "you frighten—you actually terrify me; you go to every object you have in view with such energy and decision, noting every chance circumstance which favours you, so nicely balancing motives, and weighing probabilities with such cool accuracy, that I feel how we men are mere puppets, to be moved about the board at your will."

"And for what is the game played, my dear Mr. Stocmar?" said she, with a seductive smile. "Is it not to win some one amongst you?"

"Oh, by Jove! if a man could only flatter himself that he held the right number, the lottery would be glorious sport."

"If the prize be such as you say, is not the chance worth something?" And these words were uttered with a downcast shyness that made every syllable of them thrill within him.

"What does she mean?" thought he, in all the flurry of his excited feelings. "Is she merely playing me off to make use of me, or am I to believe that she really will—after all? Though I confess to thirty-eight—I am actually no more than forty-two—only a little bald and grey in the whiskers, and—confound it, she guesses what is passing through my head.—What *are* you laughing at; do, I beg of you, tell me truly what it is?" cried he, aloud.

"I was thinking of an absurd analogy, Mr. Stocmar: some African traveller—I'm not sure that it is not Mungo Park—mentions that he used to estimate the depth of the rivers by throwing stones into them, and watching the time it took for the air bubbles to come up to the surface. Now, I was just fancying what a measure of human motives might be fashioned out of the interval of silence which intervenes between some new impression and the acknowledgment of it. You were gravely and seriously asking yourself, 'Am I in love with this woman?'"

"I was," said he, solemnly.

"I knew it," said she, laughing. "I knew it."

"And what was the answer—do you know *that*, too?" asked he, almost sternly.

"Yes, the answer was somewhat in this shape: 'I don't half trust her!'"

They both laughed very joyously after this, Stocmar breaking out into a second laugh after he had finished.

"Oh! Mr. Stocmar," cried she, suddenly, and with an impetuosity that seemed beyond her control, "I have no need of a declaration on your part. I can read what passes in *your* heart by what I feel in my own. We have each of us seen that much of life to make us afraid of rash ventures. We want better security for our investments in affection than we used to do once on a time, not alone because we have seen so many failures, but that our disposable capital is less. Come now, be frank, and tell me one thing—not that I have

a doubt about it, but that I'd like to hear it from yourself—confess honestly, you know who I am and all about me?"

So sudden and so unexpected was this bold speech, that Stocmar, well versed as he was in situations of difficulty, felt actually overcome with confusion; he tried to say something, but could only make an indistinct muttering, and was silent.

"It required no skill on my part to see it," continued she. "Men so well acquainted with life as you, such consummate tacticians in the world's strategies, only make one blunder; but you all of you make *that:* you always exhibit in some nameless little trait of manner a sense of ascendency over the woman you deem in your power. You can't help it. It's not through tyranny, it's not through insolence—it is just the man-nature in you, that's all."

"If you read us truly, you read us harshly too," began he. But she cut him short, by asking,—

"And who was your informant? Paten, wasn't it?"

"Yes, I heard everything from *him*," said he, calmly.

"And my letters—have you read *them* too?"

"No. I have heard him allude to them, but never saw them."

"So, then, there is some baseness yet left for him," said she, bitterly, "and I'm almost sorry for it. Do you know, or will you believe me when I tell it, that, after a life with many reverses and much to grieve over, my heaviest heart-sore was ever having known that man?"

"You surely cared for him once?"

"Never, never!" burst she out, violently. "When we met first I was the daily victim of more cruelties than might have crushed a dozen women. His pity was very precious, and I felt towards him as that poor prisoner we read of felt towards the toad that shared his dungeon. It was one living thing to sympathize with, and I could not afford to relinquish it, and so I wrote all manner of things—love-letters I suppose the world would call them, though some one or two might, perhaps, decipher the mystery of their meaning, and see in them all the misery of a hopeless woman's heart. No matter, such as they were, they were confessions wrung out by the rack, and need not have been recorded as calm avowals, still less treasured up as bonds to be paid off."

"But if you made him love you——"

"Made him love me!" repeated she, with insolent scorn; "how well you know your friend! But even *he* never pretended *that.* My letters in his eyes were I O U's, and no

more. Like many a one in distress, I promised any rate of interest demanded of me; he saw my misery, and dictated the terms."

"I think you judge him hardly."

"Perhaps so. It is little matter now. The question is, will he give up these letters, and on what conditions?"

"I think if you were yourself to see him——"

"*I* to see him! Never, never! There is no consequence I would not accept rather than meet that man again."

"Are you not taking counsel from passion rather than your real interest here?"

"I may be; but passion is the stronger. What sum in money do you suppose he would take? I can command nigh seven hundred pounds. Would that suffice?"

"I cannot even guess this point; but if you like to confide to me the negotiation——"

"Is it not in your hands already?" asked she, bluntly. "Have you not come out here for the purpose?"

"No, on my honour," said he, solemnly; "for once you are mistaken."

"I am sorry for it. I had hoped for a speedier settlement," said she, coldly. "And so, you really came abroad in search of theatrical novelties. Oh dear!" sighed she, "Trover said so; and it is *so* confounding when any one tells the truth!"

She paused, and there was a silence of some minutes. At last she said, "Clara disposed of, and these letters in my possession, and I should feel like one saved from shipwreck. Do you think you could promise me these, Mr. Stocmar?"

"I see no reason to despair of either," said he; "for the first I have pledged myself, and I will certainly do all in my power for the second."

"You must, then, make me another promise: you must come back here for my wedding."

"Your wedding!"

"Yes. I am going to marry Sir William Heathcote," said she, sighing heavily. "His debts prevent him ever returning to England, and, consequently, I run the less risk of being inquired after and traced, than if I were to go back to that dear land of perquisition and persecution."

"The world is very small now-a-days," muttered Stocmar. "People are known everywhere."

"So they are," said she, quickly. "But on the Continent, or at least in Italy, the detectives only give you a nod of

recognition; they do not follow you with a warrant, as they do at home. This makes a great difference, sir."

"And can you really resign yourself, at *your* age, and with *your* attractions, to retire from the world?" said he, with a deep earnestness of manner.

"Not without regret, Mr. Stocmar. I will not pretend it. But, remember, what would life be if passed upon a tight-rope, always poising, always balancing, never a moment without the dread of a fall, never a second without the consciousness that the slightest divergence might be death! Would you counsel me to face an existence like this? Remember, besides, that in the world we live in, they who wreck character are not the calumnious, they are simply the idle—the men and women who, having nothing to do, do mischief without knowing. One remarks that nobody in the room knew that woman with the blue wreath in her hair, and at once she becomes an object of interest. Some of the men have admired her; the women have discovered innumerable blemishes in her appearance. She becomes at once a topic and a theme—where she goes, what she wears, whom she speaks to, are all reported, till, at length, the man who can give the clue to the mystery, and 'tell all about her,' is a public benefactor. At what dinner-party is he not the guest?—what opera-box is denied him?—where is the coterie so select at which his presence is not welcome so long as the subject is a fresh one? They tell us that society, like the Church, must have its 'autos da fè,' but one would rather not be the victim."

Stocmar gave a sigh that seemed to imply assent.

"And so," said she, with a deeper sigh, "I take a husband, as others take the veil, for the sake of oblivion."

While she said this, Stocmar's eyes were turned towards her with a most unfeigned admiration. He felt as he might have done if a great actress were to relinquish the stage in the climax of her greatest success. He wished he could summon courage to say, "You shall not do so; there are grander triumphs before you, and we will share them together;" but, somehow, his "nerve" failed him, and he could not utter the words.

"I see what is passing in your heart, Mr. Stocmar," said she, plaintively. "You are sorry for me—you pity me—but you can't help it. Well, that sympathy will be my comfort, many a day hence, when you will have utterly forgotten me. I will think over it and treasure it when many a long mile will separate us."

Mr. Stocmar went through another paroxysm of temptation. At last he said, "I hope this Sir William Heathcote is worthy of you—I do trust he loves you."

She held her handkerchief over her face, but her shoulders moved convulsively for some seconds. Was it grief or laughter? Stocmar evidently thought the former, for he quickly said, "I have been very bold — very indiscreet. Pray forgive me."

"Yes, yes, I do forgive you," said she hurriedly, and with her head averted. "It was *my* fault, not *yours*. But here we are at your hotel, and I have got so much to say to you! Remember we meet to-night at the ball. You will know me by the cross of ribbon on my sleeve, which, if you come in domino, you will take off and pin upon your own; this will be the signal between us."

"I will not forget it," said he, kissing her hand with an air of devotion as he said "Good-bye!"

"I saw her!" whispered a voice in his ear. He turned, and Paten, whose face was deeply muffled in a coarse woollen wrapper, was beside him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SIR WILLIAM IN THE GOUT.

Sir William Heathcote in his dressing-room, wrapped up with rugs, and his foot on a stool, looked as little like a bridegroom as need be. He was suffering severely from gout, and in all the irritable excitement of that painful malady.

A mass of unopened letters lay on the table beside him, littered as it was with physic bottles, pill-boxes, and a small hand-bell. On the carpet around him lay the newspapers and reviews, newly arrived, but all indignantly thrown aside, uncared for by one too deeply engaged in his sufferings to waste a thought upon the interests of the world.

"Not come in yet, Fenton?" cried he, angrily, to his servant, "I'm certain you're mistaken; go and inquire of her maid."

"I have just asked mamselle, sir, and she says her mistress is still out driving."

"Give me my colchicum—no, the other bottle—that small phial. But you can't drop them. There, leave it down, and send Miss Leslie here."

"She is at the Gallery, sir."

"Of course she is," muttered he, angrily, below his breath; "gadding, like the rest. Is there no one can measure out my medicine? Where's Miss Clara?"

"She's in the drawing-room, sir."

"Send her here—beg her to do me the favour," cried he, subduing the irritation of his manner, as he wiped his forehead, and tried to seem calm and collected.

"Did you want me, grandpapa?" said the young girl, entering, and addressing him by the title she had one day given him in sportiveness, and which he liked to be called by.

"Yes," said he roughly, for his pain was again upon him. "I wanted any one that would be humane enough to sit with me for a while. Are you steady enough of hand to drop that medicine for me, child?"

"I think so," said she, smiling gently.

"But you must be certain, or it won't do. I'd not like to be poisoned, my good girl. Five-and-twenty drops—no more."

"I'll count them, sir, and be most careful," said she, rising, and taking the bottle.

"Egad, I scarcely fancy trusting you," said he, half peevishly. "A giddy thing like you would feel little remorse at having overdone the dose."

"Oh! grandpapa!"

"Oh! of course you'd not do it purposely. But why am I left to such chances? Why isn't your mother here? There are all my letters, besides, unread; and they cannot, if need were, be answered by this post."

"She said that she'd be obliged to call at the bank this morning, sir, and was very likely to be delayed there for a considerable time."

"I'm sure I cannot guess why. It is Trover and Twist's duty to attend to her at once. They would not presume to detain *her*. Oh! here comes the pain again! Why do you irritate me, child, by these remarks? Can't you see how they distress me?"

"Dear grandpapa, how sorry I am! Let me give you these drops."

"Not for the world! No, no, I'll not be accessary to my own death. If it come, it shall come at its own time. There,

I am not angry with you, child; don't get so pale; sit down here, beside me. What's all this story about your guardian? I heard it so confusedly last night, during an attack of pain, I can make nothing of it."

"I scarcely know more of it myself, sir. All I do know is, that he has come out from England to take me away with him, and place me, mamma says, at some Pensionnat."

"No, no; this mustn't be—this is impossible! You belong to us, dear Clara. I'll not permit it. Your poor mamma would be heart-broken to lose you."

Clara turned away, and wiped two large tears from her eyes: her lips trembled so, that she could not utter a word.

"No, no," continued he; "a guardian is all very well, but a mother's rights are very different—and such a mother as yours, Clara! Oh! by Jove! that *was* a pang! Give me that toast-and-water, child!"

It was with a rude impatience he seized the glass from her hand, and drank off the contents. "This pain makes one a downright savage, my poor Clara," said he, patting her cheek, "but old grandpapa will not be such a bear to-morrow."

"To-morrow, when I'm gone!" muttered she, half dreamily.

"And his name? What is it?"

"Stocmar, sir."

"Stocmar—Stocmar? never heard of a Stocmar, except that theatrical fellow near St. James's. Have you seen him, child?"

"No, sir. I was out walking when he called."

"Well, do the same to-morrow," cried he, peevishly, for another twitch of gout had just crossed him. "It's always so," muttered he; "every annoyance of life lies in wait for the moment a man is laid up with gout, just as if the confounded malady were not torture enough by itself. There's Charley going out as a volunteer to India, for what or why no one can say. If there had been some insurmountable obstacle to his marriage with May, he'd have remained to overcome it; but because he loves her, and that she likes *him*—— By Jove, that was a pang!" cried he, wiping his forehead, after a terrible moment of pain. "Isn't it so, Clara?" he resumed. "*You* know better than any of us that May never cared for that tutor fellow—I forget his name; besides, that's an old story now, a matter of long ago. But he *will* go. He says that even a rash resolve at six-and-twenty is far better than a vain and hopeless regret at six-and-forty: but I say, let him marry May Leslie, and he need neither incur one nor the other. And so this guardian's name is Harris?"

"No, grandpapa, Stocmar."

"Oh, to be sure. I was confounding him with another of those stage people. And what business has he to carry you off without your mother's consent?"

"Mamma *does* consent, sir. She says that my education has been so much neglected that it is actually indispensable I should study now."

"Education neglected! what nonsense! Do they want to make you a Professor of the Sorbonne? Why, child, without any wish to make you vain, you know ten times as much as half the collegiate fellows one meets, what with languages, and music, and drawing, and all that school learning of mamma's own teaching. And then that memory of yours, Clara: why, you seem to me to forget nothing."

"I remember but too well," muttered she to herself.

"What was it you said, child? I did not catch it," said he. And then, not waiting for her reply, he went on, "And all your high spirits, my little Clara, where are they gone? And your odd rhymes, that used to amuse me so? You never make them now."

"They do not cross my mind as they used to do," said she, pensively.

"You vote them childish, perhaps, like your dolls?" said he, smiling.

"No, not that. I wish with all my heart I could go back to the dolls and the nursery songs. I wish I could live all in the hour before me, making little dramas of life, with some delightful part for myself in each, and only to be aroused from the illusion to join a real world just as enjoyable."

"But surely, child, you have not reached the land of regrets already?" said he, fondly drawing her towards him with his arm.

She turned her head away, and drew her hand across her eyes.

"It is very early to begin with sorrow, my dear child," said he, affectionately. "Let me hope that it's only an April cloud, with the silver lining already peeping through."

A faint sob broke from her, but she did not speak.

"I'd ask to be your confidant only in thinking I could serve you, dearest Clara. Old men like myself get to know a good deal of life without any study of it."

She made a slight effort to disengage herself from his arm, but he held her fast, and, after a moment, she leaned her head upon his shoulder and burst out crying.

At this critical instant the door opened, and Mrs. Morris

entered. Scarcely inside the room, she stood like one spell-bound, unable to move or speak; her features, flushed by exercise, became pale as death, her lips actually livid. "Am I indiscreet?" asked she, in a voice scarcely other than a hiss of passion. "Do I interrupt a confidence, Sir William?"

"I am not sure that you do," said he, good-humouredly. "Though I was pressing Clara to accept me as a counsellor, I'm not quite certain I was about to succeed."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Morris, sarcastically. "*My* theory about young ladies excludes secrets altogether. It assumes them to be candid and open-hearted. They who walk openly, and on the high road, want little guidance beyond the dictates of a right purpose. Go to your room, Clara, and I'll be with you presently." These latter words were spoken in perfect calm, and obeyed at once. Mrs. Morris was now alone with Sir William.

The baronet felt ill at ease. With a perfect consciousness of honourable motives, there is an awkwardness in situations which seem to require explanation, if not excuse, and he waited, in a sort of fidgety impatience, that she should say something that might enable him to state what had occurred between Clara and himself.

"I hope you are better than when I left you this morning?" said she, as she untied her bonnet and seated herself in front of him.

"Scarcely so; these pains recur at every instant, and my nerves are shattered with irritability."

"I'm sorry for it, for you have need of all your firmness; bad news has come from America."

"Bad news? What sort of bad news? Is there a war——"

"A war!" said she contemptuously. "I wish it *was* a war! It's far worse than war. It's general bankruptcy. All the great houses breaking, and securities utterly valueless."

"Well, bad enough, no doubt, but it does not immediately concern *us*," said he, quickly.

"Not concern us! Why, what have we been doing these last months but buying into this share-market? Have we not invested largely in Kansas stock, in Iroquois and in Texan bonds?"

Whether he had not originally understood the transfers in which he had borne his part, or whether the pain of his seizure had effaced all memory of the events, he now sat bewildered and astounded, like one suddenly aroused from a deep sleep, to listen to disastrous news.

"But I don't understand," cried he. "I cannot see how

all this has been done. I heard you and Trover discussing it together, and I saw innumerable coloured plans of railroads that were to be, and cities that must be, and I remember something about lands to be purchased for two dollars and resold for two hundred."

"And, by all that, you have confessed to know everything that *I* did," said she, firmly. "It was explained to you that, instead of muddling away upon mortgage at home, some thirty or even forty per cent. might be realized in the States. I showed you the road by risking whatever little fortune I possessed, and you followed. Now we have each of us lost our money, and there's the whole story."

"But it's May's money I've lost!" cried he, with a voice of anguish.

"I don't suppose it matters much to whom it belonged once," said she, dryly. "The gentlemen into whose hands it falls will scarcely burden themselves to ask whence it came."

"But I had no right to gamble May Leslie's fortune!" burst he in.

"We have no time for the ethical part of the question at present," said she, calmly. "Our concern is with how we are to save the most we can. I have just seen the names of two houses at New York, which, if aided in time, will be able to stand the torrent, and eventually pay everything. To save their credit here will require about eighteen thousand pounds. It is our interest—our only hope, indeed—to rescue them. Could you induce May to take this step?"

"Induce May to peril another large portion of her fortune!" cried he, in horror and astonishment.

"Induce her to arrest what might proceed to her ruin," whispered she, in a low, distinct voice. "If these American securities are forfeited, there will be no money forthcoming to meet the calls for the Spanish railroads—no resources to pay the deposit on the concessions in Naples. You seem to forget how deep our present engagements are. We shall need above thirty thousand pounds by the 1st of March—fully as much more six weeks later."

The old man clasped his hands convulsively, and trembled from head to foot.

"You know well how ignorant she is of all we have done—all we are doing," said he, with deep emotion.

"I know well that no one ever laboured and worked for *my* benefit as I have toiled for *hers*. My endeavour was to triple, quadruple her fortune, and if unforeseen casualties

have arisen to thwart my plans, I am not deterred by such disasters. I wish I could say as much for *you*."

The ineffable insolence of her manner as she uttered this taunt, far from rousing the old man's anger, seemed only to awe and subdue him.

"Yes," continued she, "I am only a woman, and, as a woman, debarred from all those resorts where information is rife and knowledge attainable; but even working darkly, blindly, as I must, I have more reliance and courage than some men that I wot of!"

He seemed for a moment to struggle hard with himself to summon the spirit to reply to her; for an instant he raised his head haughtily, but as his eyes met hers they fell suddenly, and he muttered in a half-broken voice, "I meant all for the best!"

"Well," cried she, after a brief pause, "it is no time for regrets, or recriminations either. It is surely neither your fault nor mine that the cotton crop is a failure, or that discounts are high in Broadway. When May comes in you must explain to her what has happened, and ask her leave to sell out her Sardinian stock. It is a small sum, to be sure, but it will give us a respite for a day or two, and then we shall think of our next move."

She left the room as she said this, and anything more utterly hopeless than the old baronet it would be difficult to imagine. Bewildered and almost stunned by the difficulties around him, a sort of vague sense of reliance upon *her* sustained him so long as she was there. No sooner, however, had she gone, than this support seemed withdrawn, and he sat, the very picture of dismay and discomfiture.

The project by which the artful Mrs. Morris had originally seduced him into speculation was no other than to employ Miss Leslie's fortune as the means of making advantageous purchases of land in the States, and of discounting at the high rate of interest so freely given in times of pressure in the cities of the Union. To suffer a considerable sum to lie unprofitably yielding three per cent. at home, when it might render thirty by means of a little energy and a little skill, seemed actually absurd, and not a day used to go over, in which she would not compute, from the recorded rates of the exchanges, the large gains that might have been realized, without, as she would say, "the shadow of a shade of risk." Sir William had once gambled on 'Change and in railroad speculations the whole of a considerable estate; and the old leaven of speculation still worked within him. If there be a

spirit which no length of years can efface, no changes of time eradicate, it is the gamester's reliance upon fortune. Estranged for a long period as he had lived from all the exciting incidents of enterprise, no sooner was the picture of gain once more displayed before him than he eagerly embraced it.

"Ah!" he would say to himself, "if I had but had the advantage of *her* clear head and shrewd power of calculation long ago, what a man I might be to-day! That woman's wit of hers puts all mere men's acuteness to the blush." It is not necessary to say that the softest of blue eyes and the silkiest of brown hair did not detract very largely from the influences of her mental superiority; and Sir William was arrived at that precise lustre in which such fascinations obtain their most undisputed triumphs.

Poets talk of youth as the impressionable age; they rave about its ardour, its impetuous, uncalculating generosity, and so forth; but for an act of downwright self-forgetting devotion, for that impulsive spirit that takes no counsel from calm reason, give us an elderly gentleman—anything from sixty-four to fourscore. These are the really ardent and tender lovers—easy victims, too, of all the wiles that beset them.

Had any grave notary, or deep plotting man upon 'Change suggested to Sir William the project of employing his ward's fortune with any view to his own profit, the chances are that the hint would have been rejected as an outrage, and the suggester insulted; but the plan came from rosy lips, whispered by the softest of voices; and even the arithmetic was jotted down by fingers so taper and so white, that he lost sight of the multiples in his admiration of the calculator. His first experiences, besides, were all great successes. Kansas scrip went up to a fabulous premium. When he sold out his Salt Lake Fives he realized cent. per cent. These led him on. That "ardor nummi" which was not new in the days of the Latin poet, is as rife in *our* time as it was centuries ago.

Let us also bear in mind that there is something very fascinating to a man of a naturally active temperament to be recalled, after years of inglorious leisure, to subjects of deep and stirring interest; he likes the self-flattery of being equal to such themes, that his judgment should be as sound, his memory as clear, and his apprehension as ready as it used to be. Proud man is the old fox-hunter that can charge his "quickset" at fourscore; but infinitely prouder the old country gentleman who, at the same age, fancies himself

deep in all the mysteries of finance, and skilled in the crafty lore of the share-market.

And, last of all, he was vexed and irritated by Charley's desertion of him, and taunted by the tone in which the young man alluded to the widow and her influence in the family. To be taught caution, or to receive lessons in worldly craft from one very much our junior, is always a trial of temper; and so did everything conspire to make him an easy victim to her machinations.

And May—what of her? May signed her name when and wherever she was told, concurred with everything, and, smiling, expressed her gratitude for all the trouble they were taking on her behalf. Her only impression throughout was that property was a great source of worry; and what a fortunate thing it was for her to have met with those who understood its interests, and could deal with its eventualities! Of her large fortune she actually knew nothing. Little jests would be bandied, at breakfast and dinner, about May being the owner of vast tracts in the far West, territories wide as principalities, with mines here and great forests there, and so on, and sportive allusions to her one day becoming the queen of some far-away land beyond the sea. Save in such laughing guise as this she never approached the theme, nor cared for it.

Between May and Clara a close friendship had grown up. Besides the tastes that united them, there was another and a very tender bond that linked their hearts together. They were confidantes. May told Clara that she really loved Charles Heathcote, and never knew it till they were separated. She owned that if his careless, half indifferent way had piqued her, it was only after she had been taught to resent it. She had once even regarded it as the type of his manly, independent nature, which she now believed to be the true version of his character; and then there was a secret—a real young-lady secret—between them, fastest of all the bonds that ever bound such hearts together.

May fancied or imagined that young Layton had gone away, trusting that time was to plead for him, and that absence was to appeal in his behalf. Perhaps he had said so—perhaps he hoped it—perhaps it was a mere dream of her own. Who knows these things? In that same court of Cupid fancies are just as valid as affidavits, and the vaguest illusions quite as much evidence as testimony taken on oath.

Now, amongst all the sorrows that a young lady loves best to weep over, there is not one whose ecstasy can compare with the affliction for the poor fellow who loves her to mad-

ness, but whose affection she cannot return. It is a very strange and curious fact—and fact it is—that this same tie of a rejected devotion will occasionally exact sacrifices just as great as the most absorbing passion.

To have gained a man's heart, as it were, in spite of him—to have become the depositary of all his hopes, and yet not given him one scrap of a receipt for his whole investment—has a wonderful attraction for the female nature. It is the kind of debt of honour she can appreciate best of all, and, it must be owned, it is one she knows how to deal with in a noble and generous spirit. To the man so placed with regard to her she will observe an undying fidelity; she will defend him at any cost—she will uphold him at any sacrifice. Now, May not only confessed to Clara that Layton had made her the offer of his heart, but she told how heavily on her conscience lay the possible—if it were so much as possible—sin of having given him any encouragement.

"You must write to the poor fellow for me, Clara. You must tell him from me—from myself, remember—that it would be only a cruelty to suffer him to cherish hope; that my self-accusings—painful enough now—would be tortures if I were to deceive him. I'm sure it is better—no matter what the anguish be—to deal thus honestly and fairly; and you can add, that his noble qualities will be ever dwelt on by me—indeed, you may say, by both of us—with the very deepest interest, and that no higher happiness could be, than to hear of his success in life."

May said this and much more to the same purpose. She professed to feel for him the most sincere friendship, faintly foreshadowing throughout that it was not the least demerit on his part his being fascinated by such attractions as hers, though they were, in reality, not meant to captivate him.

I cannot exactly say how far Clara gave a faithful transcript of her friend's feelings, for I never saw but a part of the letter she wrote; but certainly it is only fair to suppose, from its success, that it was all May could have desired.

The epistle had followed Layton from an address he had given in Wales to Dublin, thence to the north of Ireland, and finally overtook him in Liverpool the night before he sailed for America.

He answered it at once. He tendered all his gratitude for the kind thoughtfulness that had suggested the letter. He said that such an evidence of interest was inexpressibly dear to him at a moment when nothing around or about him was of the cheeriest. He declared that, going to a far-away land,

with an uncertain future before him, it was a great source of encouragement to him to feel that good wishes followed his steps; that he owned, in a spirit of honest loyalty, that few as were the months that had intervened, they were enough to convince him of the immense presumption of his proffer. "You will tell Miss Leslie," wrote he, "that in the intoxication of all the happiness I lived in at the Villa, I lost head as well as heart. It was such an atmosphere of enjoyment as I had never breathed before—may never breathe again. I could not stop to analyze what it was that imparted such ecstasy to my existence, and naturally enough tendered all my homage and all my devotion to one whose loveliness was so surpassing! If I was ever unjust enough to accuse her of having encouraged my rash presumption, let me now entreat her pardon. I see and own my fault."

The letter was very long, but not always very coherent. There was about it a humility that smacked more of wounded pride than submissiveness, and occasionally a sort of shadowy protest that, while grateful for proffered friendship, he felt himself no subject for pity or compassion. To use the phrase of Quackinboss, to whom he read it, "it closed the account with that firm, and declared no more goods from that store."

But there was a loose slip of paper enclosed, very small, and with only a few lines written on it. It was to Clara herself. "And so you have kept the slip of jessamine I gave you on that day—gave you so ungraciously, too. Keep it still, dear Clara. Keep it in memory of one who, when he claims it of you, will ask you to recall that hour, and never again forget it!"

This she did *not* show to May Leslie; and thus was there one secret which she treasured in her own heart, alone.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A WARM DISCUSSION.

"I KNEW it—I could have sworn to it," cried Paten, as he listened to Stocmar's narrative of his drive with Mrs. Morris. "She has just done with *you* as with fifty others. Of course you'll not believe that you can be the dupe—she'd not dare to throw her net for such a fish as *you*. Ay, and land you afterwards, high and dry, as she has done with scores of fellows as sharp as either of us."

Stocmar sipped his wine, half simpering at the passionate warmth of his companion, which, not without truth, he ascribed to a sense of jealousy.

"I know her well," continued Paten, with heightened passion. "I have reason to know her well; and I don't believe that this moment you could match her for falsehood in all Europe. There is not a solitary spot in her heart without a snare in it."

"Strange confession this, from a lover," said Stocmar, smiling.

"If you call a lover one that would peril his own life to bring shame and disgrace on hers, I am such a man."

"It is not more than a week ago you told me, in all seriousness, that you would marry her, if she'd have you."

"And I say it again, here and now; and I say more, that if I had the legal right over her that marriage would give me, I'd make her rue the day she outraged Ludlow Paten."

"It was Paul Hunt that she slighted, man," said Stocmar, half sneeringly. "You forget that."

"Is this meant for a threat, Stocmar?"

"Don't be a fool," said the other, carelessly. "What I meant was, that other times had other interests, and neither she, nor you, nor, for that matter, I myself, want to live over the past again."

Paten threw his cigar angrily from him, and sat brooding and moody; for some time nothing was heard between them save the clink of the decanter as they filled their glasses, and passed the wine.

"Trover's off," muttered Paten, at last.

"Off! Where to?"

"To Malta, I believe; and then to Egypt—anywhere, in short, till the storm blows over. This American crash has given them a sharp squeeze."

"I wonder who'll get that Burgundy? I think I never drank such Chambertin as that he gave us t'other night."

"I'd rather pick up that pair of Hungarian chestnuts. They are the true 'Yucker' breed, with nice straight slinging action."

"His pictures, too, were good."

"And such cigars as the dog had! He told me, I think, he had about fifteen thousand of those Cubans."

"A vulgar hound!—always boasting of his stable, or his cellar, or his conservatory! I can't say I feel sorry for him."

"Sorry for him! I should think not. The fellow has had his share of good fortune, living up there at that glorious villa in luxury. It's only fair he should take his turn on the shady side of the road."

"These Heathcotes must have got it smartly too from the Yankees. They invested largely there of late."

"So Trover told me. Almost the last words he said were: 'The man that marries that girl for an heiress, will find he has got a blind nut. Her whole fortune is swept away."

"I wonder is that true."

"I feel certain it is. Trover went into all sorts of figures to show it. I'm not very much up in arithmetic, and so couldn't follow him; but I gathered that they'd made their book to lose, no matter how the match came off. That was to be expected when they trusted such things to a woman."

Another and a longer pause now ensued between them; at length Paten broke it abruptly, saying, "And the girl—I mean Clara—what of her?"

"It's all arranged; she is to be Clara Stocmar, and a pensionnaire of the Conservatoire of Milan within a week."

"Who says so?" asked Paten, defiantly.

"Her mother—well, you know whom I mean by that title—proposed, and I accepted the arrangement. She may, or may not, have dramatic ability; like everything else in life, there is a lottery about it. If she really do show cleverness, she will be a prize just now. If she has no great turn of speed, as the jocks say, she'll always do for the Brazils and Havannah. They never send *us* their best cigars, and, in return, *we* only give *them* our third-rate singers!"

It was evident in this speech that Stocmar was trying, by a jocular tone, to lead the conversation into some channel

less irritating and disputatious; but Paten's features relaxed nothing of their stern severity, and he looked dogged and resolute as before.

"I think, Stocmar," said he, at length, "that there is still a word wanting to that same bargain you speak of. If the girl's talents are to be made marketable, why should not I stand in for something?"

"You—you, Ludlow!" cried the other. "In the name of all that is absurd, what pretext can *you* have for such a claim?"

"Just this: that I am privy to the robbery, and might peach if not bought up."

"You know well this is mere blind menace, Ludlow," said the other, good-humouredly; "and as to letting off squibs, my boy, don't forget that you live in a powder magazine."

"And what if I don't care for a blow up? What if I tell you that I'd rather send all sky-high to-morrow than see that woman succeed in all her schemes, and live to defy me?"

"As to that," said Stocmar, gravely, "the man who neither cares for his own life or character can always do damage to those of another; there is no disputing about that."

"Well, I am exactly such a man, and *she* shall know it." Not a word was spoken for several minutes, and then Paten resumed, but in a calmer and more deliberate tone, "Trover has told me everything. I see her whole scheme. She meant to marry that old baronet, and has been endeavouring, by speculating in the share-market, to get some thousands together; now, as the crash has smashed the money part of the scheme, the chances are it will have also upset the marriage. Is not that likely?"

"That is more than I can guess," said Stocmar, doubtingly.

"*You* can guess it, just as *I* can," said Paten, half angrily. "She's not the woman to link her fortune with a ruined man. Can't you guess *that?*" Stocmar nodded, and Paten went on: "Now, *I* mean to stand to win on either event—that's *my* book."

"I don't understand you, Paul."

"Call me Ludlow, confound you," said Paten, passionately, "or that infernal name will slip out some day unawares. What I would say is, that, if she wishes to be 'My Lady,' she must buy *me* off first. If she'll consent to become my wife—that is the other alternative."

"She'll never do that," said Stocmar, gravely.

"How do you know—did she tell you so?"

"Certainly not."

"You only know it, then, from your intimate acquaintance with her sentiments," said he, sneeringly.

"How I know, or why I believe it, is my own affair," said Stocmar, in some irritation; "but such is my conviction."

"Well, it is not mine," said Paten, filling up his glass, and drinking it slowly off. "I know her somewhat longer—perhaps somewhat better—than you do; and if I know anything in her, it is that she never cherishes a resentment when it costs too high a price."

"You are always the slave of some especial delusion, Ludlow," said Stocmar, quietly. "You are possessed with the impression that she is afraid of you. Now, my firm persuasion is, that the man or woman that can terrify *her* has yet to be born."

"How she has duped you!" said Paten, insolently.

"That may be," said he. "There is, however, one error I have not fallen into—I have not fancied that she is in love with me."

This sally told; for Paten became lividly pale, and he shook from head to foot with passion. Careful, however, to conceal the deep offence the speech had given him, he never uttered a word in reply. Stocmar saw his advantage, and was silent also. At last he spoke, but it was in a tone so conciliatory and so kindly withal, as to efface, if possible, all unpleasant memory of the last speech. "I wish you would be guided by me, Ludlow, in this business. It is not a question for passion or vindictiveness; and I would simply ask you, Is there not space in the world for both of you, without any need to cross each other? Must your hatred of necessity bridge over all distance, and bring you incessantly into contact? In a word, can you not go your road, and let her go hers, unmolested?"

"Our roads lie the same way, man. I want to travel with her," cried Paten.

"But not in spite of her!—not, surely, if she declines your company!"

"Which *you* assume that she must, and I am as confident that she will not."

Stocmar made an impertinent gesture at this, which Paten quickly perceiving, resented, by asking, in a tone of almost insult, "What do you mean? Is it so very self-evident that a woman must reject me? Is that your meaning?"

"Any woman that ever lived would reject the man who pursues her with a menace. So long as you presume to

wield an influence over her by a threat, your case must be hopeless."

"These are stage and behind-scene notions—they never were gleaned from real life. Your theatrical women have little to lose, and it can't signify much to them whether a story more or less attach to their names. Threats of exposure would certainly affright them little; but your woman living in the world, holding her head amongst other women, criticizing their dress, style, and manner—think of *her* on the day that the town gets hold of a scandal about her! Do you mean to tell *me* there's any price too high to pay for silencing it?"

"What would you really take for those letters of hers, if she were disposed to treat for them?"

"I offered them once to old Nick Holmes for two thousand pounds. I'd not accept that sum now."

"But where or how could she command such an amount?"

"That's no affair of mine. I have an article in the market, and I'm not bound to trouble myself as to the straits of the purchaser. Look here, Hyman Stocmar," said he, changing his voice to a lower tone, while he laid his hand on the other's arm—"look here. You think me very vindictive and very malignant in all this, but if you only knew with what insults she has galled me, what cruel slights she has passed upon me, you'd pity rather than condemn me. If she would have permitted me to see and speak to her—if I could only be able to appeal to her myself—I don't think it would be in vain; and, if I know anything of myself, I could swear I'd bear up with the cruelest thing she could utter to me, rather than these open outrages that come conveyed through others."

"And if that failed, would you engage to restore her letters?—for some possible sum, I mean, for you know well two thousand is out of the question. She told me she could command some six or seven hundred pounds. She said so, believing that I really came to treat with her on the subject."

Paten shook his head dissentingly, but was silent. At last he said, "She must have much more than this at her command, Stocmar. Hawke's family never got one shilling by his death; they never were able to trace what became of his money, or the securities he held in foreign funds. I remember how Godfrey used to go on about that girl of his being one day or other the greatest heiress of her time. Take *my* word for it, Loo could make some revelations on this theme. Come," cried he, quickly, as a sudden thought flashed across him, "I'll tell you what I'll do. You are to meet her this

evening at the masked ball. Let me go in your place. "I'll give you my solemn promise not to abuse the opportunity, nor make any scandal whatever. It shall be a mere business discussion between us; so much for so much. If she comes to terms, well. If she does not agree to what I propose, there's no harm done. As I said before, there shall be no publicity—no scene."

"I can't accede to this, Ludlow. It would be a gross breach of faith on my part," said Stocmar, gravely.

"All your punctilio, I remark, is reserved for *her* benefit," said Paten, angrily. "It never occurs to you to remember that *I* am the injured person."

"I only think of the question as it displays a man on one side, and a woman on the other. Long odds in favour of the first—eh?"

"You think so!" said Paten, with a sneer. "By Jove! how well you judge such matters. I can't help wondering what becomes of all that subtlety and sharpness you show when dealing with stage folk, when you come to treat with the world of every-day life. Why, I defy the wiliest serpent of the ballet to overreach you, and yet you suffer this woman to wind you round her finger!"

"Well, it is a very pretty finger!" laughed Stocmar.

"Yes, but to have you at her feet in this fashion!"

"And what a beautiful foot, too!" cried Stocmar, with enthusiasm.

Something that sounded like a malediction was muttered by Paten as he arose and walked the room with passionate strides. "Once more, I say," cried he, "let me take your place this evening, or else I'll call on this old fool—this Sir William Heathcote—and give him the whole story of his bride. I'm not sure if it's not the issue would give me most pleasure. I verily believe it would."

"It's a smart price to pay for a bit of malice, too!" said Stocmar, musing. "I must say, there are some other ways in which the money would yield me as much pleasure."

"Is it a bargain, Stocmar? Do you say yes?" cried Paten, with heightened excitement.

"I don't see how I can agree to it," broke in the other. "If she distinctly tells me that she will not meet you——"

"Then she shall, by ——" cried Paten, confirming the determination by a terrible oath. "Look out, now, Stocmar, for a scene," continued he, "and gratify yourself by the thought it is all your own doing. Had you accepted my proposal, I'd have simply gone in your place, made myself

known to her without scandal or exposure, and, in very few words, declared what my views were, and learned how far she'd concur with them. You prefer an open rupture before the world. Well, you shall have it!"

Stocmar employed all his most skilful arguments to oppose this course. He showed that, in adopting it, Paten sacrificed every prospect of self-interest and advantage, and, for the mere indulgence of a cruel outrage, that he compromised a position of positive benefit. The other, however, would not yield an inch. The extreme concession that Stocmar, after a long discussion, could obtain was, that the interview was not to exceed a few minutes, a quarter of an hour at furthest; that there was to be no *éclat* or exposure, so far as he could pledge himself; and that he would exonerate Stocmar from all the reproach of being a willing party to the scheme. Even with these stipulations, Stocmar felt far from being reconciled to the plan, and declared that he could never forgive himself for his share in it.

"It is your confounded self-esteem is always uppermost in your thoughts," said Paten, insolently. "Just please to remember you are no foreground figure in this picture, if you be any figure at all. I feel full certain *she* does not want you —I'll take my oath *I* do not—so leave us to settle our own affairs our own way, and don't distress yourself because you can't interfere with them."

With this rude speech, uttered in a tone insolent as the words, Paten arose and left the room. Scarcely had the door closed after him, however, than he reopened it, and said,—

"Only one word more, Stocmar. No double—no treachery with me here. I'll keep my pledge to the very letter; but if you attempt to trick or to overreach me, I'll blow up the magazine."

Before Stocmar could reply, he was gone.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LOO AND HER FATHER.

MRS. MORRIS, supposed to be confined to her room with a bad headache, was engaged in dressing for the masked ball, when a small twisted note was delivered to her by her maid.

"Is the bearer of this below stairs?" asked she, eagerly. "Show him in immediately."

The next moment, a short, burly figure, in a travelling-dress, entered, and, saluting her with a kiss on either cheek, unrolled his woollen comforter, and displayed the pleasant, jocund features of Mr. Nicholas Holmes.

"How well you are looking, papa," said she. "I declare I think you grow younger!"

"It's the good conscience, I suppose," said he, laughing. "That and a good digestion help a man very far on his road through life. And how are you, Loo?"

"As you see," said she, laughingly. "With some of those family gifts you speak of, I rub on through the world tolerably well."

"You are not in mourning, I perceive. How is that?" asked he, looking at the amber-coloured silk of her dress.

"Not to-night, papa, for I was just dressing for a masked ball at the Pergola, whither I was about to go on the sly, having given out that I was suffering from headache, and could not leave my room."

"Fretting over poor Penthony, eh?" cried he, laughing.

"Well, of course that might also be inferred. Not but I have already got over my violent grief. I am beginning to be what is technically called 'resigned.'"

"Which is, I believe, the stage of looking out for another!" laughed he again.

She gave a little faint sigh, and went on with her dressing. "And what news have you for me, papa? What is going on at home?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing, dear. You don't care for political news?"

"Not much. You know I had a surfeit of Downing Street

once. By the way, papa, only think of my meeting George!"

"Ogden—George Ogden?"

"Yes, it was a strange accident. He came to fetch away a young lad that happened to be stopping with us, and we met face to face—fortunately, alone—in the garden."

"Very awkward that!" muttered he.

"So it was; and so he evidently felt it. By the way, how old he has grown. George can't be more than—let me see—forty-six. Yes, he was just forty-six on the 8th of August. You'd guess him fully ten years older."

"How did he behave? Did he recognize you and address you?"

"Yes; we talked a little—not pleasantly though. He evidently is not forgiving in his nature, and you know he had never much tact—except official tact—and so he was flurried and put out, and right glad to get away."

"But there was no *éclat*—no scandal?"

"Of course not. The whole incident did not occupy ten minutes."

"They've been at me again about my pension—*his* doing, I'm sure," muttered he—"asking for a return of services, and such-like rubbish."

"Don't let them worry you, papa; they dare not push you to publicity. It's like a divorce case, where one of the parties, being respectable, must submit to any terms imposed."

"Well, that's my own view of it, dear; and so I said, 'Consult the secret instructions to the Under-Secretary for Ireland for an account of services rendered by N. H.'"

"You'll hear no more of it," said she, flippantly. "What of Ludlow? Where is he?"

"He's here. Don't you know that?"

"Here! Do you mean in Florence?"

"Yes; he came with Stocmar. They are at the same hotel."

"I declare I half suspected it," said she, with a sort of bitter laugh. "Oh, the cunning Mr. Stocmar, that must needs deceive me!"

"And you have seen him?"

"Yes; I settled about his taking Clara away with him. I want to get rid of her—I mean altogether—and Stocmar is exactly the person to manage these little incidents of the white slave-market. But," added she, with some irritation, "that was no reason why you should dupe *me*, my good Mr.

Stocmar! particularly at the moment when I had poured all my sorrows into your confiding breast!"

"He's a very deep fellow, they tell me."

"No, papa, he is not. He has that amount of calculation —that putting this, that, and t'other together, and seeing what they mean—which all Jews have; but he makes the same blunder that men of small craft are always making. He is eternally on the search after motives, just as if fifteen out of every twenty things in this life are not done without any motive at all!"

"Only in Ireland, Loo—only in Ireland."

"Nay, papa, in Ireland they do the full twenty," said she, laughing. "But what has brought Ludlow here? He has certainly not come without a motive."

"To use some coercion over you, I suspect."

"Probably enough. Those weary letters—those weary letters!" sighed she. "Oh, papa dear—you, who were always a man of a clear head and a subtle brain—how did you fall into the silly mistake of having your daughter taught to write? Our nursery-books are crammed with cautious injunctions—'Don't play with fire,' &c.—and of the real peril of all perils not a word of warning is uttered, and nobody says, 'Avoid the ink-stand.'"

"How could you have fallen into such a blunder?" said he, half peevishly.

"I gave rash pledges, papa, just as a bankrupt gives bad bills. I never believed I was to be solvent again."

"We must see what can be done, Loo. I know he is very hard up for money just now; so that probably a few hundreds might do the business."

She shook her head doubtingly, but said nothing.

"A fellow-traveller of mine, unacquainted with him personally, told me that his bills were seen everywhere about town."

"Who is your companion?"

"An Irishman called O'Shea."

"And is the O'Shea here too?" exclaimed she, laughingly.

"Yes; since he has lost his seat in the House, England has become too hot for him. And besides," added he, slyly, "he has told me in confidence that if 'the party,' as he calls them, should not give him something, he knows of a widow somewhere near this might suit him. I don't say that she's rich, mind you,' said he, 'but she's 'cute as a fox, and would be sure to keep a man's head above water somehow.'"

Mrs. Morris held her handkerchief to her mouth, but the

sense of the ridiculous could not be suppressed, and she laughed out.

"What would I not have given to have heard him, papa!" said she, at last.

"Well, it really *was* good," said he, wiping his eyes; for he, too, had indulged in a very hearty laugh, particularly when he narrated all the pains O'Shea had been at to discover who Penthony Morris was, where he came from, and what fortune he had. "'It was at first all in vain,' said he, 'but no sooner did I begin to pay fellows to make searches for me, than I had two, or maybe three, Penthony Morrises every morning by the post; and, what's worse, all alive and hearty!'"

"What did he do under these distressing circumstances?" asked she, gaily.

"He said he'd give up the search entirely. 'There's no such bad hunting country' said he, 'as where there's too many foxes, and so I determined I'd have no more Penthony Morrises, but just go in for the widow without any more inquiry.'"

"And have you heard the plan of his campaign?" asked she.

"He has none—at least, I think not. He trusts to his own attractions and some encouragement formerly held out to him."

"Indiscreet wretch!" said she, laughing; "not but he told the truth, there. I remember having given him something like what lawyers call a retainer."

"Such a man might be very troublesome, Loo," said he, cautiously.

"Not a bit of it, papa; he might be very useful, on the contrary. Indeed, I'm not quite certain that I have not exactly the very service on which to employ him."

"Remember, Loo," said he, warmly, "he's a shrewd fellow in *his* way."

"'In *his* way' he is, but *his* way is not *mine*," said she, with a saucy toss of the head. "Have you any idea, papa, of what may be the sort of place or employment he looks for? Is he ambitious, or has adversity taught him humility?"

"A good deal depends upon the time of the day when one talks to him. Of a morning he is usually downcast and depressed; he'd go out as a magistrate to the Bahamas or consul to a Poyais republic. Towards dinner-time he grows more difficult and pretentious; and when he has got three or four glasses of wine in, he wouldn't take less than the governorship of a colony."

"Then it's of an evening one should see him."

"Nay, I should say not, Loo. I would rather take him at his cheap moment."

"Quite wrong, papa—quite wrong. It is when his delusions are strongest that he will be most easily led. His own vanity will be the most effectual of all intoxications. But you may leave him to *me* without fear or misgiving."

"I suppose so," said he, dryly. And a silence of some minutes ensued. "Why are you taking such pains about your hair, Loo," asked he, "if you are going in domino?"

"None can ever tell when or where they must unmask in this same life of ours, papa," said she, laughingly; "and I have got such a habit of providing for casualties, that I have actually arranged my papers and letters in the fashion they ought to be found in after my death."

Holmes sighed. The thought of such a thing as death is always unwelcome to a man with a light auburn wig and a florid complexion, who wants to cheat Fate into the notion that he is hale and hearty, and who likes to fancy himself pretty much what he was fifteen or twenty years ago. And Holmes sighed with a feeling of compassionate sorrow for himself.

"By the way, papa," said she in a careless, easy tone, "where are you stopping?"

"At the Hôtel d'Italie, my dear."

"What do you think—hadn't you better come here?"

"I don't exactly know, nor do I precisely see how."

"Leave all that to *me*, papa. You shall have an invitation —'Sir William Heathcote's compliments,' &c.—all in due form, in the course of the day, and I'll give directions about your room. You have no servant, I hope?"

"None."

"So much the better; there is no guarding against the garrulity of that class, and all the craftiest stratagems of the drawing-room are often undermined in the servants'-hall. As for yourself, you know that you represent the late Captain's executor. You were the guardian of poor dear Penthony, and his oldest friend in the world."

"Knew him since he was so high!" said he, in a voice of mock emotion, as he held out his extended palm about two feet above the floor.

"That will give you a world of trouble, papa, for you'll have to prepare yourself with so much family history, explaining what Morrises they were, how they were Penthonys, and so on. Sir William will torture you about genealogies."

"I have a remedy for that, my dear," said he, slyly. "I

am most painfully deaf! No one will maintain a conversation of a quarter of an hour with me without risking a sore throat; not to say that no one can put delicate questions in the voice of a boatswain."

"Dear papa, you are always what the French call 'at the level of the situation,' and your deafness will be charming, for our dear baronet and future husband has a most inquisitive turn, and would positively torture you with interrogatories."

"He'll be more than mortal if he don't give in, Loo. I gave a Lunacy Commissioner once a hoarseness that required a course of the waters at Vichy to cure; not to say that, by answering at cross purposes, one can disconcert the most zealous inquirer. But now, my dear, that I am in possession of my hearing, do tell me something about yourself and your plans."

"I have none, papa—none," said she, with a faint sigh. "Sir William Heathcote has doubtless many, and into some of them I may, perhaps, enter. He intends, for instance, that some time in March I shall be Lady Heathcote; that we shall go and live—I'm not exactly sure where, though I know we're to be perfectly happy, and, not wishing to puzzle him, I don't ask how."

"I have no doubt you will be happy, Loo," said he, confidently. "Security, safety, my dear, are great elements of happiness."

"I suppose they are," said she, with another sigh; "and when one has been a privateer so long, it is pleasant to be enrolled in the regular navy, even though one should be laid up in ordinary."

"Nay, nay, Loo, no fear of that!"

"On the contrary, papa, every hope of it! The best thing I could ask for would be oblivion."

"My dear Loo," said he, impressively, "the world has not got one-half so good a memory as you fancy. It is our own foolish timidity—what certain folk call conscience—that suggests the idea how people are talking of us, and, like the valet in the comedy, we begin confessing our sins before we're accused of them!"

"I know that is *your* theory, papa," said she, laughing, "and that one ought always to 'die innocent.'"

"Of course, my dear. It is only the gaol chaplain benefits by what is called 'a full disclosure of the terrible tragedy.'"

"I hear my carriage creeping up quietly to the door," said she, listening. "Be sure you let me see you early to-morrow. Good night."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A GRAVE SCENE IN LIGHT COMPANY.

Moralists have often found a fruitful theme in the utter barrenness of all the appliances men employ for their pleasures. What failures follow them—what weariness—what satiety and heart-sickness! The feast of Belshazzar everywhere!

To the mere eye nothing could be more splendid, nothing more suggestive of enjoyment, than the Pergola of Florence when brilliantly lighted and thronged with a gay and merry company. Character figures in every variety fancy or caprice could suggest—Turks, Styrians, Highlanders, Doges, Dervishes, and Devils—abounded, with Pifferari from Calabria, Muleteers, Matadors, and Conjurors; Boyards from Tobolsk jostled Male Crusaders, and Demons that might have terrified St. Anthony flitted past with Sisters of Charity! Strange parody upon the incongruities of our every-day life, costume serving but to typify the moral incompatibilities which are ever at work in our actual existence! for are not the people we see linked together—are not the social groupings we witness—just as widely separated by every instinct and every sentiment as are these characters, in all their motley? Are the two yonder, as they sit at the fireside, not as remote from each other as though centuries had rolled between them? They toil along, it is true, together; they drag the same burden, but with different hopes, and fears, and motives. Bethink you "the friends so linked together" are like-minded? No, it is all masquerade; and the motley is that same easy conventionality by which we hope to escape undetected and unknown!

Our business now is not with the mass of this great assemblage; we are only interested for two persons—one of whom, a tall figure in a black domino, leans against a pillar yonder, closely scrutinizing each new-comer that enters, and eagerly glancing at the sleeve of every yellow domino that passes.

He has been there from an early hour of the evening, and never left it since. Many a soft voice has whispered some empty remark on his impassiveness; more than once a jesting sarcasm has been uttered upon his participation in the gaiety

The Parting at the Masquerade

around; but he has never replied, but with folded arms patiently awaited the expected one. At last he is joined by another, somewhat shorter and stouter, but dressed like him, who, bending close to his ear, whispers,—

"Why are you standing here—have you not seen her?"

"No; she has never passed this door."

"She entered by the stage, and has been walking about this hour. I saw her talking to several, to whom, to judge by their gestures, her remarks must have been pointed enough; but there she is—see, she is leaning on the arm of that Malay chief. Join her; you know the signal."

Paten started suddenly from his lounging attitude, and cleft his way through the crowd, little heeding the comments his rude persistence called forth. As he drew nigh where the yellow domino stood, he hesitated and glanced around him, as though he felt that every eye was watching him, and only after a moment or so did he seem to remember that he was disguised. At last he approached her, and, taking her sleeve in his hand, unpinned the little cross of tricolored ribbon and fastened it on his own domino. With a light gesture of farewell she quickly dismissed her cavalier and took his arm.

As he led her along through the crowd, neither spoke, and it was only at last, as seemingly baffled to find the spot he sought for, she said,—

"All places are alike here. Let us talk as we walk along."

A gentle pressure on her arm seemed to assent, and she went on:

"It was only at the last moment that I determined to come here this evening. You have deceived me. Yes; don't deny it. Paten is with you here, and you never told me."

He muttered something that sounded like apology.

"It was unfair of you," said she, hurriedly, "for I was candid and open with you; and it was needless besides, for we are as much apart as if hundreds of miles separated us. I told you already as much."

"But why not see him? He alone can release you from the bond that ties you; he may be more generous than you suspect."

"He generous! Who ever called him so?"

"Many who knew him as well as you," cried he, suddenly.

With a bound she disengaged her arm from him, and sprang back.

"Do not touch me; lay so much as a finger on me, and I'll unmask and call upon this crowd for protection!" cried she, in a voice trembling with passion. "I know you now."

"Let me speak with you a few words—the last I shall ever ask," muttered he, "and I promise all you dictate."

"Leave me—leave me at once," said she, in a mere whisper. "If you do not leave me, I will declare aloud who you are."

"Who *we* are; don't forget yourself," muttered he.

"For that I care not. I am ready."

"For mercy's sake, Loo, do not," cried he, as she lifted her hand towards the strings of her mask. "I will go. You shall never see me more. I came here to make the one last reparation I owe you, to give you up your letters, and say good-bye for ever."

"That you never did—never!" cried she, passionately. "You came because you thought how, in the presence of this crowd, the terror of exposure would crush my woman's heart, and make me yield to any terms you pleased."

"If I swear to you by all that I believe is true——"

"You never did believe—your heart rejected belief. When I said I knew you, I meant it all: I *do* know you. I know, besides, that when the scaffold received one criminal, it left another, and a worse, behind. For many a year you have made my life a hell. I would not care to go on thus; all your vengeance, and all the scorn of the world, would be light compared to what I wake to meet each morning, and close my eyes to, as I sleep at night."

"Listen to me, Loo, but for one moment. I do not want to justify myself. You are not more wretched than I am—utterly, irretrievably wretched!"

"Where are the letters?" said she, in a low whisper.

"They are here—in Florence."

"What sum will you take for them?"

"They shall be yours unbought, Loo, if you will but hear me."

"I want the letters—tell me their price."

"The price is simply, one meeting—one opportunity to clear myself before you—to show you how for years my heart has clung to you."

"I cannot buy them at this cost. Tell me how much money you will have for them."

"It is your wish to outrage, to insult me, then?" muttered he, in a voice thick with passion.

"Now you are natural; now you are yourself; and now I can speak to you. Tell me your price."

"Your shame!—your open degradation! The spectacle of your exposure before all Europe, when it shall have been read in every language, and talked of in every city."

"I have looked for that hour for many a year, Paul Hunt, and its arrival would be mercy, compared with the daily menace of one like *you*."

"The story of the murder again revived—the life you led, the letters themselves revealing it—the orphan child robbed of her inheritance—the imposture of your existence abroad here!—what variety in the scenes! what diversity in the interests!"

"I am far from rich, but I would pay you liberally, Paul," said she, in a voice low and collected.

"Cannot you see, woman, that by this language you are wrecking your last hope of safety?" cried he, insolently. "Is it not plain to you that you are a fool to insult the hand that can crush you?"

"But I *am* crushed; I can fall no lower," whispered she, tremulously.

"Oh, dearest Loo, if you would forgive me for the past!"

"I cannot—I cannot!" burst she out, in a voice scarcely above a whisper. "I have done all I could, but I cannot!"

"If you only knew how I was tempted to it, Loo! If you but heard the snare that was laid for me!"

A scornful toss of her head was all her answer.

"It is in my consciousness of the wrong I have done you that I seek this reparation, Loo," said he, eagerly. "When I speak otherwise, it is my passion gives utterance to the words. My heart is, however, true to you."

"Will you let me have my letters, and at what cost? I tell you again, I am not rich, but I will pay largely, liberally here."

"Let me confess it, Loo," said he, in a trembling tone, "these letters are the one last link between us. It is not for a menace I would keep them—so help me Heaven, the hour of *your* shame would be that of *my* death—but I cling to them as the one tie that binds my fate to yours. I feel that when I surrender them, that tie is broken—that I am nothing to you—that you would hear my name unmoved, and see me pass without a notice. Bethink you, then, that you ask me for what alone attaches me to existence."

"I cannot understand such reasonings," said she, coldly. "These letters have no other value save the ruin they can work me. If not employed to that end, they might as well blacken in the fire or moulder into dust. You tell me you are not in search of any vengeance on me, and it is much to say, for I never injured you, while you have deeply injured

me. Why, therefore, not give up what you own to be so useless?"

"For the very reason I have given you, Loo; that, so long as I hold them, I have my interest in your heart, and you cannot cease to feel bound up with my destiny."

"And is not this vengeance?" asked she, quietly. "Can you picture to your mind a revenge more cruel, living on from day to day, and gathering force from time?"

"But to me there is ever the hope that the past might come back again."

"Never—never!" said she, resolutely. "The man who has corrupted a woman's heart may own as much of it as can feel love for him; but he who has held up to shame the dishonour he has provoked must be satisfied with her loathing and her hate."

"And you tell me that these are my portion?" said he, sternly.

"Your conscience can answer how you have earned them."

They walked along side by side in silence for some time, and at last she said, "How much better, for both of us, to avoid words of passion or remembrances of long ago."

"You loved me once, Loo," broke he in, with deep emotion.

"And if I once contracted a debt which I could not pay you now, would you insult me for my poverty, or persecute me? I do not think so, Ludlow."

"And when I have given them to you, Loo, and they are in your hands, how are we to meet again? Are we to be as utter strangers to each other?" said he, in deep agitation.

"Yes," replied she, "it is as such we must be. There is no hardship in this; or, if there be, only what one feels in seeing the house he once lived in occupied by another—a passing pang, perhaps, but no more."

"How you are changed, Loo!" cried he.

"How silly would it be for the trees to burst out in bud with winter! and the same folly were it for us not to change as life wears on. Our spring is past, Ludlow."

"But I could bear all if you were not changed to me," cried he, passionately.

"Far worse, again. I am changed to myself, so that I do not know myself," said she.

"I know well how your heart reproaches me for all this, Loo," said he, sorrowfully; "how you accuse me of being the great misfortune of your life. Is it not so?"

"Who can answer this better than yourself?" cried she, bitterly.

"And yet, was it not the whole aim and object of my existence to be otherwise? Did I not venture everything for your love?"

"If you would have me talk with you, speak no more of this. You have it in your power to do me a great service, or work me a great injury; for the first, I mean to be more than grateful; that is, I would pay all I could command; for the last, your recompense must be in the hate you bear me. Decide which path you will take, and let me face my future as best I may."

"There is one other alternative, Loo, which you have forgotten."

"What is it?"

"Can you not forgive me?" said he, almost sobbing as he spoke.

"I cannot—I cannot," said she. "You ask me for more than any human heart could yield. All that the world can heap upon me of contempt would be as nothing to what I should feel for myself if I stooped to that. No, no; follow out your vengeance if it must be, but spare me to my own heart."

"Do you know the insults you cast upon me?" cried he, savagely. "Are you aware that it is to my own ears you speak these words?"

"Do not quarrel with me because I deal honestly by you," said she, firmly. "I will not promise that I cannot pay. Remember, too, Ludlow, that what I ask of you I do not ask from your generosity. I make no claim to what I have forfeited all right. I simply demand the price you set upon a certain article of which to *me* the possession is more than life. I make no concealment from you. I own it frankly—openly."

"You want your letters, and never to hear more of *me!*" said he, sternly.

"What sum will you take for them?" said she, in a slow, whispering voice.

"You ask what will enable you to set me at defiance for ever, Loo! Say it frankly and fairly. You want to tear your bond and be free."

She did not speak, and he went on,—

"And you can ask this of the man you abhor! you can stoop to solicit him whom, of all on earth, you hate the most!"

Still she was silent.

"Well," said he, after a lengthened pause, "you shall have them. I will restore them to you. I have not got them here—they are in England—but I will fetch them. My word on it that I will keep my pledge. I see," added he, after an interval, in which he expected she would speak, but was still silent—"I see how little faith you repose in a promise. You cannot spare one word of thanks for what you regard as so uncertain; but I can endure this, for I have borne worse. Once more, then, I swear to you, you shall have your letters back. I will place them myself in your hands, and before witnesses, too. Remember that, Loo—before witnesses!" And with these words, uttered with a sort of savage energy, he turned away from her, and was soon lost in the crowd.

"I have followed you this hour, Loo," said a low voice beside her.

She turned and took the speaker's arm, trembling all over, and scarcely able to keep from falling.

"Take me away, father—take me away from this," said she, faintly. "I feel very ill."

"It was Paten was with you. I could not mistake him," said Holmes. "What has occurred between you?"

"I will tell you all when I get home," said she, still speaking faintly. And now they moved through the motley crowd, with sounds of mirth and words of folly making din around them. Strange discrepant accents to fall on hearts as full as theirs! "How glad I am to breathe this fresh cold night air," cried she, as they gained the street. "It was the heat, the noise, and the confusion overcame me, but I am better now."

"And how have you parted with him?" asked her father, eagerly.

"With a promise that sounds like a threat," said she, in a hollow voice. "But you shall hear all."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MR. STOCMAR'S VISIT.

It was not without trepidation that Mr. Stocmar presented himself, the morning after the events we have recorded, at the residence of Sir William Heathcote. His situation was, indeed, embarrassing; for not only had he broken faith with Mrs. Morris in permitting Paten to take his place at the ball, but as Paten had started for England that same night without even communicating with him, Stocmar was completely puzzled what to do, and how to comport himself.

That she would receive him haughtily, disdainfully even, he was fully prepared for; that she would reproach him—not very measuredly, too—for his perfidy regarding Paten, he also expected. But even these difficulties were less than the embarrassment of not knowing how her meeting with Paten had been conducted, and to what results it had led. More than once did he stop in the street and deliberate with himself whether he should not turn back, hasten to his hotel, and leave Florence without meeting her. Nor was he quite able to say why he resisted this impulse, nor how it was that, in defiance of all his terrors, he found himself at length at her door.

The drawing-room into which he was shown was large and splendidly furnished. A conservatory opened from one end, and at the other a large folding glass door gave upon a spacious terrace, along which a double line of orange-trees formed an alley of delicious shade. Scarcely had Stocmar passed the threshold than a very silvery voice accosted him from without.

"Oh, do come here, dear Mr. Stocmar, and enjoy the delightful freshness of this terrace. Let me present a very old friend of my family to you—Captain Holmes. He has just returned from India, and can give you the very latest news of the war." And the gentlemen bowed, and smiled, and looked silly at each other. "Is not all this very charming, Mr. Stocmar?—at a season, too, when we should, in our own country, be gathering round coal fires and screening ourselves from draughts. I am very angry with you—very,"

whispered she, as she gave him her hand to kiss, "and I am not at all sure if I mean ever to be friends with you again."

And poor Mr. Stocmar bowed low and blushed, not through modesty, indeed, but delight, for he felt like the schoolboy who, dreading to be punished, hears he is to be rewarded.

"But I *am* forgiven, am I not?" muttered he.

"Hush! Be cautious," whispered she. "Here comes Sir William Heathcote. Can't you imagine yourself to have known him long ago?"

The hint was enough; and as the old baronet held out his hand with his accustomed warmth, Stocmar began a calculation of how many years had elapsed since he had first enjoyed the honour of shaking that hand. This is a sort of arithmetic elderly gentlemen have rather a liking for. It is suggestive of so many pleasant little platitudes about "long ago," with anecdotic memories of poor dear Dick or Harry, that it rarely fails to interest and amuse. And so they discussed whether it was not in '38 or '39—whether in spring or in autumn—if Boulter—"poor Tom," as they laughingly called him—had not just married the widow at that time; and, in fact, through the intervention of some mock dates and imaginary incidents, they became to each other like very old friends.

Those debatable nothings are of great service to Englishmen who meet as mere acquaintances; they relieve the awkwardness of looking out for a topic, and they are better than the eternal question of the weather. Sir William had, besides, a number of people to ask after, and Stocmar knew everybody, and knew them, too, either by some nickname, or some little anecdotic clue very amusing to those who have lived long enough in the world to be interested by the same jokes on the same people—a time of life, of course, not ours, dear reader, though we may come to it one day; and Captain Holmes listened to the reminiscences, and smiled, and smirked, and "very true'd," to the great enjoyment of the others; while Mrs. Morris stole noiselessly here and there cutting camellias for a bouquet, but not unwatchful of the scene.

"I hope and trust I have been misinformed about your plans here, Mr. Stocmar," said Sir William, who was so happy to recall the names of former friends and acquaintances. "You surely do not mean to run away from us so soon?"

A quick glance from Mrs. Morris telegraphed his reply,

and he said, "I am most unfortunately limited for time. I shall be obliged to leave immediately."

"A day or two you could surely spare us?" said Heathcote.

Stocmar shook his head with a deploring smile, for another glance, quick as the former, had given him his instructions.

"I have told you, Sir William, how inexorable he is about Clara, and although at first I stoutly opposed his reasonings, I am free to own that he has convinced me his plan is the true one; and as he has made all the necessary arrangements —have you not, Mr. Stocmar?—and they are charming people she will be with—he raves about them," said she, in a sort of whisper, while she added, still lower, "and I partly explained to him my own projected change—and, in fact, it is better as it is—don't you think so?" and thus hurrying Sir William along—a process not unlike that by which an energetic rider hustles a lazy horse through heavy ground—she at least made him feel grateful that he was not called upon for any increased exercise of his judgment. And then Stocmar followed, like another counsel in the same brief—half jocularly, to be sure, and like one not required to supply more than some illustrative arguments. He remarked that young ladies now-a-days were expected to be models of erudition—downright professors; no smatterings of French and Italian, no water-colour sketches touched up by the master—"they must be regular linguists, able to write like De Sévigné, and interpret Dante." In a word, so much did he improve the theme, that he made Sir William shudder at the bare thought of being domesticated with so much loose learning, and thank his stars that he had been born in a generation before it. Not but the worthy baronet had his own secret suspicions that Clara wanted little aid from all their teachings; his firm belief being, that she was the most quick-witted, gifted creature ever existed, and it was in a sort of triumphant voice he asked Mrs. Morris, "Has Mr. Stocmar seen her?"

"Not yet," said she, dryly. "Clara is in my room. Mr. Stocmar shall see her presently, for, as he insists on leaving this to-morrow——"

"To-morrow—to-morrow!" cried Sir William, in amaze ment.

And then Stocmar, drawing close to Sir William, began confidentially to impart to him how, partly from over-persuasion of certain great people, partly because he liked that sort of thing, he had got into theatrical management. "One

must do something. You know," said he, "I hate farming; never was much of a sportsman; had no turn for politics; and so, by Jove! I thought I'd try the stage. I mean, of course, as manager, director, 'impresario,' or whatever you call it. I need not tell you it's a costly amusement, so far as expense goes. I might have kept the best house in town, and the best stables in Leicestershire, for far less than I have indulged my dramatic tastes; but I like it; it amuses, it interests me!" And Stocmar drew himself up and stuck his hands into his waistcoat-pockets, as though to say, "Gaze, and behold a man rich enough to indulge a costly caprice, and philosophic enough to pay for the pleasure that rewards him." "Yes, sir," he added, "my last season, though the Queen took her private box, and all my noble friends stood stanchly to me, brought me in debt no less than thirteen thousand seven hundred pounds! That's paying for one's whistle, sir—eh?" cried he, as though vain of his own defeat.

"You might have lost it in the funds, and had no pleasure for it," said Sir William, consolingly.

"The very remark I made, sir. The very thing I said to Lord Snaresby. I might have been dabbling in those Yankee securities, and got hit just as hard."

Sir William made a wry face and turned away. He hoped that Captain Holmes had not overheard the allusion; but the Captain was deep in *Galignani*, and heard nothing.

"It is this," continued Stocmar, "recalls me so suddenly to England. We open on the 24th, and I give you my word of honour we have neither tenor, basso, nor barytone engaged, nor am I quite sure of my prima donna."

"Who ever was?" whispered Mrs. Morris, slyly; and then added aloud, "Come now, and let me present Clara to you. We'll return presently, Sir William." And, so saying, she slipped her arm within Stocmar's and led him away.

"Who is that Captain Holmes?" asked he, as they walked along.

"Oh, a nobody; an old muff."

"Is he deaf, or is it mere pretence?"

"Deaf as a post."

"I know his face perfectly. I've seen him about town for years back."

"Impossible! He has been collecting revenue, distressing Talookdars, or Ryots, or whatever they are, in India, these thirty-odd years. It was some one you mistook for him." She had her hand on the lock of the door as she said this.

She paused before opening it, and said, "Remember, you are her guardian—your word is law." And they entered.

Stocmar was certainly not prepared for the appearance of the young girl who now rose to receive him with all the practised ease of the world. She was taller, older-looking, and far handsomer than he expected, and, as Mrs. Morris said, "Your guardian, Clara," she curtseyed deeply, and accepted his salutation at once with deference and reserve.

"I am in the most painful of all positions," began he, with a courteous smile. "My first step in your acquaintance is as the ungracious herald of a separation from all you love."

"I have been prepared, sir, for your intentions regarding me," said she, coldly.

"Yes, Mr. Stocmar," broke in Mrs. Morris, quickly, "though Clara is very young, she is thoroughly aware of our circumstances; she knows the narrowness of our fortune, and the necessity we are under of effort for our future support. Her own pride and her feeling for me are sufficient reasons for keeping such matters secret. She is not ignorant of the world, little as she has seen of it, and she comprehends that our acceptance with our friends is mainly dependent on our ability to dispense with their assistance."

"Am I to be a governess, sir?" asked Clara, with a calm which the death-like paleness of her face showed to have cost her dearly.

"A governess! a governess!" repeated he, looking at Mrs. Morris for his cue, for the suddenness of the question had routed all his preparations. "I think not—I should hope not: indeed, I am enabled to say, there is no thought of that."

"If so," continued Clara, in the same calm tone, "I should like to be with very young children. I am not afraid of being thought menial."

"Clara," broke in Mrs. Morris, harshly, "Mr. Stocmar has already assured you that he does not contemplate this necessity." She looked towards him as she spoke, and he at once saw it was his duty to come up to the rescue, and this he did with one of those efforts all his own. He launched forth boldly into generalities about education and its advantages; how, with the development of the mind and the extension of the resources, came new fields of exercise, fresh realms of conquest. "None of us, my dear young lady," cried he, "not the worldliest nor the wisest of us, can ever tell when a particular acquirement will be the key-stone of our future fortune." He illustrated his theory with copious instances. "There was Mademoiselle Justemar, whom nobody had ever

imagined to be an artiste, came out as Alice one evening that the prima donna was ill, and took the whole town by storm. There was that little creature, Violetta; who ever fancied she could dance till they saw her as Titania? Every one knew of Giulia Barducci, taken from the chorus, to be the greatest Norma of the age."

He paused and looked at her, with a stare of triumph in his features; his expression seemed to say, "What think you of that glorious Paradise I have led you to look at?"

"It is very encouraging indeed, sir," said Clara, dryly, but with no semblance of irony; "very encouraging. There is, then, really no reason that one day I might not be a rope-dancer."

"Clara," cried Mrs. Morris, severely, "you must curb this habit, if you will not do better by abandoning it altogether. The spirit of repartee is the spirit of impertinence."

"I had really hoped, mamma," said she, with an air of simplicity, "that, as all Mr. Stocmar's illustrations were taken from the stage, I had caught the spirit of his examples in giving one from the circus."

"I'll be sworn you're fond of riding," cried Stocmar, eager to relieve a very awkward crisis even by a stupid remark.

"Yes, sir; and I am very clever in training. I know the whole 'Bauchet' system, and can teach a horse his 'flexions,' and the rest of it. Well, but, mamma," broke she in, apologetically, "surely my guardian ought to be aware of my perfections, and if *you* won't inform him, *I* must."

"You perceive, sir," said Mrs. Morris, "that when I spoke of her flippancy, I was not exaggerating."

"You may rely upon it, Mr. Stocmar," continued Clara, "mamma's description of me was only justice."

Stocmar laughed, and hoped that the others would have joined him; but in this he was unhappily disappointed; they were even graver than before; Mrs. Morris showing, in her heightened colour, a degree of irritation, while Clara's pale face betrayed no sign of emotion.

"You are to leave this to-morrow, Clara," said Mrs. Morris, coldly.

"Very well, mamma," was the quiet answer.

"You don't seem very eager to know for whither," said Stocmar, smiling. "Are all places alike to you?"

"Pretty much so, sir," said she, in the same voice.

"You were scarcely prepared for so much philosophy, I'm sure, Mr. Stocmar," said Mrs. Morris, sneeringly. "Pray confess yourself surprised."

"Call it ignorance, mamma, and you'll give it the right name. What do *I* know of the world, save from guide and road-books? and, from the little I have gleaned, many a village would be pleasanter to me than Paris."

"More philosophy, sir. You perceive what a treasure of wisdom is about to be entrusted to your charge."

"Pray bear that in mind, sir," said Clara, with a light laugh; "and don't forget that, though the casket has such a leaden look, it is all pure gold."

Never was poor Stocmar so puzzled before. He felt sailing between two frigates in action, and exposed to the fire of each, though a non-combatant; nor was it of any use that he hauled down his flag, and asked for mercy; they only loaded and banged away again.

"I must say," cried he at last, "that I feel very proud of my ward."

"And I am charmed with my guardian," said she, curtseying, with an air that implied far more of grace than sincerity in its action.

Mrs. Morris bit her lip, and a small red spot on her cheek glowed like a flame.

"I have explained fully to Mr. Stocmar, Clara," said she, in a cold, calm tone, "that from to-morrow, forward, your allegiance will be transferred from *me* to *him;* that with him will rest all authority and direction over you; that, however interested—naturally interested—I must continue to feel in your future, *he*, and *he* alone, must be its arbiter. I repeat this now, in his presence, that there may be no risk of a misconception."

"Am I to write to you, mamma?" asked the girl, in a voice unmoved as her own.

"Yes, you will write; that is, I shall expect to hear from you in reply to my letters. This we will talk over together."

"Am I to correspond with you, sir?" said she, addressing Stocmar in the same impassive way.

"Oh! by all means. I shall take it as the greatest of favours. I shall be charmed if you will honour me so far."

"I ask, sir," continued she, "because I may chance to have companions in the place to which I am going; and, even to satisfy *their* scruples, one ought to have some belongings."

There was not the shadow of irritation in the manner in which these words were spoken, and yet Stocmar heard them with a strange thrill of pity, and Mrs. Morris grew pale as she listened to them.

"Clara," said Mrs. Morris, gravely, "there are circum-

stances in our relations to each other which you will only learn when we have parted. I have committed them to writing for your own eye alone. They will explain the urgency of the step I am now taking, as much for *your* sake as for *mine*. When you have read and carefully pondered over that paper, you will be convinced that this separation is of necessity."

Clara bowed her head in assent, but did not speak.

"You will also see, Clara," resumed she, "that it is very far from likely the old relations between us will ever again be resumed. If we do meet again—an event that may or may not happen—it will be as some distant cousins—som who have ties of kindred between them, and no more."

Clara nodded again, but still in silence.

"You see, sir," said Mrs. Morris, turning towards Stocmar, while her eyes flashed angrily—"you see, sir, that I am handing over to your care a model of obedience—a young lady who has no will save that of those in authority over her—not one rebellious sentiment of affection or attachment in her nature."

"And who will ever strive to preserve your good opinions, sir, by persevering in this wise course," said Clara, with a modest curtsey.

If any one could have read Mr. Stocmar's heart at that moment, he would have detected no very benevolent feelings towards either mother or daughter, while he sincerely deplored his own fate at being in such company.

"Don't you think, mamma," said the girl, with an easy smile, "that, considering how recently we have known this gentleman, we have been sufficiently explicit and candid before him, and that any pretence of emotion in his presence would be most unbecoming? He will, I am sure, forgive us the omission. Won't you, sir?"

Stocmar smiled and bowed, and blushed and looked miserable.

"*You* have been very candid, at all events, Clara," said Mrs. Morris; "and Mr. Stocmar—or I mistake him much—must have acquired a considerable insight into the nature of his charge. Sir William expects to see you at dinner to-day, Clara," added she, in an easier tone. "He hopes to be well enough to come to table, and as it will be your last evening here——"

"So it will," said the girl, quickly; "and I must fetch down Beethoven with me, and play his favourites for him once more."

Mrs. Morris raised her eyebrows with an expressive look at Stocmar, and led him from the room. Scarcely had the door closed, when the girl threw herself, half kneeling, on the sofa, and sobbed as if her very heart was breaking.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VERY OUTSPOKEN ON THE WORLD AT LARGE.

And there came a next morning to all this. Oh, these same next mornings of life!—strange leaves in that book of our daily existence, now dark and black-lettered, now bright in all the glories of golden tracery! For so is it, each day is a fresh page to be written "with chalk or charcoal," as it may be.

Two travelling-carriages took their way from Florence on that morning, one for Bologna, with Mr. Stocmar and Clara, the other for Rome, with the Heathcotes, Captain Holmes having his place in the rumble. Old soldier that he was, he liked the open-air seat, where he could smoke his cigar and see the country. Of all those who journeyed in either, none could vie with him in the air of easy enjoyment that he wore; and even the smart Swiss maid at his side, though she might have preferred a younger companion, was fain to own, in her own peculiar English, that he was full of little bounties (*bontés*) in her regard. And when they halted to bait, he was so amiable and full of attentions to every one, exerting the very smallest vocabulary to provide all that was needed—never abashed by failure or provoked by ridicule—always good-tempered, always gay. It was better than colchicum to Sir William to see the little fat man washing the salad himself at the fountain, surrounded by all the laughing damsels of the hostel, who jeered him on every stage of his performance; and even May, whose eyes were red with crying after Clara, had to laugh at the disasters of his cookery and the blunders of his Italian. And then he gossiped about with landlords and postboys, till he knew of every one who had come or was coming, what carriages, full

of Russian Princes, could not get forward for want of horses, and what vetturinos, full of English, had been robbed of everything. He had the latest intelligence about Garibaldi, and the names of the last six Sicilian Dukes shot by the King of Naples. Was he not up, too, in his John Murray, which he read whenever Mademoiselle Virginia was asleep, and sold out in retail at every change of post-horses?

Is it not strange that this is exactly the sort of person one needs on a journey, and yet is only by the merest accident to be chanced upon? We never forget the courier, nor the valet, nor the soubrette but the really invaluable creature—the man who learns the name of every village, the value of all coinage, the spot that yields good wine, the town where the peaches are fullest of flavour, or the roses richest in perfume—we leave him to be picked up at hazard, if picked up at all. It is an unaccountable prejudice that makes the parasite unpopular. For who is it that relieves life of much of its asperities?—who is it that provides so unceasingly that our capon should be well roasted and our temper unruffled?—who, like him, to secure all the available advantages of the road, and, when disasters *will* occur, to make them food for laughter?

How patient, how self-sacrificing, how deferential to caprices and indulgent to whims is the man whose daily dinner you pay for! If you would see humanity in holiday attire, look out for one like *him*. How blandly does he forgive the rascalities of *your* servants and the robberies of *your* tradesmen! no fretfulness about trifles disfigures the calm serenity of his features. He knows that if the travelling-carriage be thought heavy, it is only two leaders the more are required; if the wine be corked, it is but ordering another bottle. Look at life from his point of view, and it is surprising how little there is to complain of. It would be too much to say that there was not occasionally a little acting in all this catholic benevolence and universal satisfaction, but no more, perhaps, than the fervour of a lawyer for his client—that nisi prius enthusiasm marked five guineas on the brief.

The Captain understood his part like an artist; and through all the condescending forgiveness he bestowed on the shortcomings of inns and innkeepers, he suffered, ever half imperceptibly, to peer out the habits of a man accustomed to the best of everything, who always had been sedulously served and admirably cared for. His indulgence was thus generosity, not ignorance, and all irritability in such a presence would stand rebuked at once.

Sir William declared he had never seen his equal—such temper, such tact, such resources in difficulty, such patience under all trials. May pronounced him charming. He could obtain something eatable in the veriest desolation, he could extract a laugh out of disasters that seemed to defy drollery; and, lastly, Mrs. Morris herself averred "that he was unlike every old Indian she had ever seen, for he seemed not to know what selfishness meant—but so, indeed, 'poor Penthony' had always described him." And here she would wipe her eyes and turn away in silence.

As they rolled along the road, many a little scheme was devised for detaining him at Rome, many a little plot laid for making him pass the carnival with them. Little knew they the while, how, seated in the rumble close behind, he, too, revolved the self-same thoughts, asking himself by what means he could secure so pleasant a harbour of refuge. Will it not occasionally occur in life that some of those successes on which we pride ourselves have been in a measure prepared by others, and that the adversary has helped us to win the game we are so vain of having scored?

"Well, how do you like them?" said Mrs. Morris, as she smoked her cigarette at the end of the little garden at Viterbo, after Sir William and May had said good night—"how do you like them, pa?"

"They're wonderful—they're wonderful!" said the Captain, puffing his weed. "It's a long time since I met anything so fresh as that old baronet?"

"And with all that," said she, "his great vanity is to think he knows 'the world.'"

"So he may, my dear. I can only say it isn't *your* world nor *mine*," replied he, laughing.

"And yet there is a class in which such men as he are the clever ones, where their remarks are listened to and their observations treasured, and where old ladies in turbans and bird-of-paradise feathers pronounce them 'such well-informed men.' Isn't that the phrase, pa?"

"Yes, that's the phrase. An old article of the *Quarterly* committed to memory, some of Doctor Somebody's predictions about the end of the world, and Solomon's proverbs done into modern English, make a very well-informed man."

"And a most insupportable bore besides. After all, papa," said she, "it is in the land-locked creeks, the little waveless bays, that one must seek his anchorage, and not in the breezy roadsteads nor the open ocean. I've thought over the matter a good deal lately, and I believe that to be the wise choice."

"You are right, Loo," said he; "ease is the great thing—ease and security! What settlement can he make?"

"A small one; just enough to live on. The son would be better in that respect, but then I shouldn't like it; and, besides, he would live as long as myself—longer, perhaps—and you know one likes to have a look forward, though it be ever so far away off."

"Very true—very true," said he, with a mild sigh. "And this Miss Leslie," added he, after a while; "she'll marry, I suppose?"

"Oh yes; her fortune will still be considerable—at least, I hope so. That man Trover has taken all the papers away with him, but he'll turn up some day or other. At all events, there will be quite enough to get her a Roman Count or a Sicilian Duke, and as they are usually sent to the galleys or shot in a few years, the endurance is not prolonged. These are Trover's cigars, ain't they? I know them well."

"Yes; it was your friend Stocmar filled my case yesterday."

"Another of the would-be shrewd ones!" said she, laughing."

"I didn't fancy him much," said he.

"Nor I either; he is *such* a snob. Now, one can't live with a snob, though one may dine with him, smoke, flirt, ride, and chat with him. Is it not so?"

"Perfectly true."

"Sir William is not snobbish. It is his one redeeming quality."

"I see that. I remarked it the first day we met."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" sighed she, drearily, "what a tame, poor, commonplace thing life becomes when it is reduced to English cookery for health, and respectability for morals! I could marry Stocmar if I pleased, papa."

"Of course you could."

"Or O'Shea—'the O'Shea,'" said she, with a laugh. "How droll to be the 'she' of that species! I could have *him* also."

"Not also, but either, dear," said the Captain, correcting her.

"I meant that, papa," laughed she in, "though, perhaps—perhaps poor Mr. Ogden mightn't see that your objection was called for." And then they both laughed once more at the droll conceit. "We are to be married on some day before Lent," said she, after a pause. "I must positively get an almanack, papa, or I shall make confusion in my dates."

"The Lent begins late this year," remarked he.

"Does it? So much the better, for there is much to be thought of. I trust to you for the settlements, papa. You will have to be inexorable on every stage of the proceedings; and as for *me*, I know nothing of business—never did, never could."

"But that is not exactly the character you have figured in here of late."

"Oh, papa dear," cried she, "do you imagine, if reason or judgment were to be invoked, that Sir William would ever marry me? Is it not because he is blind to every inconsistency and every contradiction that the poor man has decided on this step?"

"Where do you mean to live? Have you any plans on that score?"

"None, except where there are fewest English; the smallest possible population of red whiskers and red petticoats, and the least admixture of bad tongues and Balmoral boots. If we cannot find such a spot, then a city—a large city, where people have too many resources to be obliged to amuse themselves with scandal."

"That's true; I have always remarked that where the markets were good, and fish especially abundant, people were less censorious. In small localities, where one eats kid every day, the tendency to tear your neighbour becomes irresistible. I'm convinced that the bad tongue of boarding-house people may be ascribed to the bad diet."

"Perfectly true, papa; and when you dine with us you shall have no excuse for malevolence. There," said she, throwing away the end of her cigar, "I can't afford to light another one this evening, I have got so few of those delicious Cubans. Oh dear," sighed she, "what a strange destiny is mine! Whenever I enter the marriage state it must always be with a connection where there are no small vices, and *I* fond of them!"

And so saying, she drew her shawl around her, and strolled lazily towards the house, while the Captain, selecting another cheroot, sat himself down in a snug spot in the arbour to muse, and meditate, and moralize after his fashion. Had any one been there to mark him as he gazed upwards at the starry sky, he might readily have deemed him one lost in heavenly contemplation, deep in that speculative wisdom that leaves the frontier of this narrow life far, far behind, and soars to realms nobler, vaster, grander. But not so were his thoughts; they were earthy of the earthiest, craft and subtlety crossed

and recrossed them, and in all their complex web not one chord was to be found which could vibrate with an honest wish or a generous aspiration. There was not, nevertheless, a ruddier complexion, a brighter eye, a merrier voice, or a better digestion than his in Christendom.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FROM CLARA.

It was just as Alfred Layton stepped into the boat to row out to the *Asia*, bound for New York, that a letter from Clara was placed in his hands. He read it as they rowed along—read it twice, thrice over. It was a strange letter—at least, he thought so—from one so very young. There was a tone of frankness almost sisterly, but there was, in alluding to the happy past, a something of tenderness half shadowed forth that thrilled strangely through his heart. How she seemed to love those lessons he had once thought she felt to be mere tasks! How many words he had uttered at random—words of praise or blame, as it might be—she had treasured all up, just as she had hoarded the flowers he had given her. What a wondrous sensation it is to feel that a chance expression we have used, a few stray words, have been stored up as precious memories! Is there any flattery like it? What an ecstasy to feel that we could impart value to the veriest commonplace, and, without an effort, without even a will, sit enthroned within some other heart!

What wisdom there was in that old fable of the husbandman, who bequeathed the treasure to his sons to be discovered by carefully turning over the soil of their land, delving and digging it industriously. How applicable is the lesson it teaches to what goes on in our daily lives, where, ever in search of one form of wealth, our labours lead us to discover some other of which we knew nothing. Little had Alfred Layton ever suspected that, while seeking to gain May's affection, he was winning another heart; little knew he that in that atmosphere of love his deep devotion made, she—scarcely

more than a child—lived and breathed, mingling thoughts of him through all the efforts of her mind, till he became the mainspring of every ambition that possessed her. And now he knew it all. Yes, she confessed, as one never again fated to meet him, that she loved him. "If," wrote she, "it is inexpressible relief to me to own this, I can do so with less shame that I ask no return of affection; I give you my heart, as I give that which has no value, save that I feel it is with *you*, to go along with you through all the straits and difficulties of your life, to nourish hope for your success and sorrow for your failure, but never to meet you more. . . . . Nor," said she, in another place, "do I disguise from myself the danger of this confession. They say it is man's nature to despise the gift which comes unasked, the unsought heart is but an undesired realm. Be it so. So long as the thought fills me that *you* are its lord, so long as to myself I whisper vows of loyalty, I am not worthless in my own esteem. I can say, '*He* would like this—*he* would praise me for that—some word of good cheer would aid me here—how joyously *he* would greet me as I reached this goal!' 'Bravely borne, dear Clara!' would requite me for a cruel sacrifice. You are too generous to deny me this much, and I ask no more. None of us can be the worse of good wishes, none be less fortunate that daily blessings are entreated for us. Mine go with you everywhere and always."

These lines, read and re-read so often, weighed heavily on Layton's heart; and she who wrote them was never for an instant from his thoughts. At first, sorrow and a sense of self-reproach were his only sentiments; but gradually another feeling supervened. There is not anything which supplies to the heart the want of being cared for. There is that companionship in being loved, without which life is the dreariest of all solitudes. As we are obliged to refer all our actions to a standard of right and wrong, so by a like rule all our emotions must be brought before another court—the heart that loves us; and he who has not this appeal is a wretched outlaw! This Layton now began to feel, and every day strengthened the conviction. The last few lines of the letter, too, gave an unspeakable interest to the whole. They ran thus:—

"I know not what change has come over my life, or is to come, but I am to be separated from my mother, entrusted to a guardian I have never seen till now, and sent I know not whither. All that I am told is that our narrow fortune requires I should make an effort for my own support. I am

grateful to the adversity that snatches me from a life of thought to one of labour. The weariness of work will be far easier to bear than the repinings of indolence. Self-reproach will be less poignant, too, when not associated with self-indulgence; and, better than all, a thousand times better, I shall feel in my toil some similitude to him whom I love—feel, when my tired brain seeks rest, some unseen thread links my weariness to his, and blends our thoughts together in our dreams, fellow-labourers at least in life, if not lovers!"

When he had read thus far, and was still contemplating the lines, a small slip, carefully sealed in two places, fell from the letter. It was inscribed "My Secret." Alfred tore it open eagerly. The contents were very brief, and ran thus:—

"She whom I had believed to be my mother is not so. She is nothing to me. I am an orphan. I know nothing of those belonging to me, nor of myself, any more than that my name is *not* 'Clara Morris.'"

Layton's first impulse, as he read, was to exclaim, "Thank God, the dear child has no tie to this woman!" The thought of her being her daughter was maddening. And then arose the question to his mind, by what link had they been united hitherto? Mrs. Morris had been ever to him a mysterious personage, for whom he had invented numberless histories, not always to her advantage. But why, or through what circumstances, this girl had been associated with her fortunes, was a knot he could find no clue to. There arose, besides, another question, why should this connection now cease, by what change in condition were they to be separated, and was the separation to be complete and final? Clara ought to have told him more; she should have been more explicit. It was unfair to leave him with an unsolved difficulty, which a few words might have set clear. He was half angry with her for the torture of this uncertainty, and yet—let us own it—in his secret heart he hugged this mystery as a new interest that attached him to life. Let a man have ever so little of the gambler in his nature—and we have never pictured Layton as amongst that prudent category—and there will be still a tendency to weigh the eventualities of life, as chances inclining now to this side, now to that. "I was lucky in that affair"—"I was unfortunate there," are expressions occasionally heard from those who have never played a card or touched a dice-box. And where does this same element play such a part as when a cloud of doubt and obscurity involves the fate of one we love?

For the first few days of the voyage Layton thought of nothing but Clara and her history, till his mind grew actually confused with conflicting guesses about her. "I must tell Quackinboss everything. I must ask his aid to read this mystery, or it will drive me mad," said he, at last. "He has seen her, too, and liked her." She was the one solitary figure he had met with at the Villa which seemed to have made a deep impression upon him; and over and over again the American had alluded to the "'little gal' with the long eyelashes, who sang so sweetly."

It was not very easy to catch the Colonel in an unoccupied moment. Ever since the voyage began he was full of engagements. He was an old Transatlantic voyager, deep in all the arts and appliances by which such journeys are rendered agreeable. Such men turn up everywhere. On the Cunard line they organize the whist parties, the polka on the poop-deck, the sweepstakes on the ship's log, and the cod-fishing on the banks. On the overland route, it is they who direct where tents are to be pitched, kids roasted, and Arabs horse-whipped. By a sort of common accord a degree of command is conceded to them, and their authority is admitted without dispute. Now and then a rival will contest the crown, and by his party divide the state; but the community is large enough for such schism, which, after all, is rarely a serious one. The Pretender, in the present case, had come on board by the small vessel which took the pilot away; a circumstance not without suspicion, and, of course, certain of obtaining its share of disparaging comments, not the less that the gentleman's pretensions were considerable and his manners imposing. In fact, to use a vulgarism very expressive of the man, "he took on" immensely. He was very indignant at not finding his servant expecting him, and actually out of himself on discovering that a whole state-room had not been engaged for his accommodation. With all these disappointing circumstances, it was curious enough how soon he reconciled himself to his condition, submitting with great good humour to all the privations of ordinary mortals; and when, on the third or fourth day of the voyage, he deigned to say that he had drunk worse Madeira, and that the clam soup was really worthy of his approval, his popularity was at once assured. It was really pleasant to witness such condescension, and so, indeed, every one seemed to feel it. All but one, and that one was Quackinboss, who, from the first moment, had conceived a strong dislike against the new arrival, a sentiment he took no pains to conceal or disguise.

"He's too p'lite—he's too civil by half, sir—especially with the women folk," said Quackinboss; "they ain't wholesome when they are so tarnation sweet. As Senator Byles says, 'Bunkum won't make pie-crust, though it'll serve to butter a man up.' Them's my own sentiments too, sir, and I don't like that stranger."

"What can it signify to you, Colonel?" said Layton. "Why need you trouble your head about who or what he is?"

"I'll be bound he's one of them as pays his debts with the topsail sheet, sir. He's run. I'm as sartain o' that fact as if I seen it. Whenever I see a party as won't play whist under five-guinea points, or drink anything cheaper than Moët at four dollars a bottle, I say look arter that chap, Shaver, and you'll see it's another man's money pays for him."

"But, after all," remonstrated Layton, "surely you have nothing to do with him?"

"Well, sir, I'm not downright convinced on that score. He's a-come from Florence; he knows all about the Heathcotes and Mrs. Morris, and the other folk there; and he has either swindled *them*, or they've been a-roguing some others. That's *my* platform, sir, and I'll not change one plank of it."

"Come, come," said Layton, laughingly, "for the first time in your life you have suffered a prejudice to override your shrewd good sense. The man is a snob, and no more."

"Well, sir, I'd like to ask, could you say worse of him? Ain't a snob a fellow as wants to be taken for better bred, or richer, or cleverer, or more influential than he really is? Ain't he a cheat? Ain't he one as says, 'I ain't like that poor publican yonder, I'm another guess sort of crittur, and sit in quite another sort of place?' Jest, now, picture to your own mind how pleasant the world would be if one-fourth, or even one-tenth, of its inhabitants was fellows of that stamp!"

It was only after two or three turns on the deck that Layton could subdue the Colonel's indignation sufficiently to make him listen to him with calm and attention. With a very brief preamble he read Clara's letter for him, concluding all with the few lines inscribed "My Secret." "It is about this I want your advice, dear friend," said he. "Tell me frankly what you think of it all."

Quackinboss was always pleased when asked his advice upon matters which at first blush might seem out of the range of his usual experiences. It seemed such a tribute to

his general knowledge of life, that it was a very graceful species of flattery, so that he was really delighted by this proof of Layton's confidence in his acuteness and his delicacy, and in the exact proportion of the satisfaction he felt was he disposed to be diffuse and long-winded.

"This ain't an easy case, sir," began he; "this ain't one of those measures where a man may say, 'There's the right and there's the wrong of it;' and it takes a man like Shaver Quackinboss—a man as has seen snakes with all manner o' spots on 'em—to know what's best to be done."

"So I thought," mildly broke in Layton—"so I thought."

"There's chaps in this world," continued he, "never sees a difficulty nowhere; they'd whittle a hickory stick with the same blade as a piece of larch timber, sir; ay, and worse, too, never know how they gapped their knife for the doin' it! You'd not believe it, perhaps, but the wiliest cove ever I seen in life was an old chief of the Mandans, Aï-ha-ha-tha, and his rule was, when you're on a trail, track it step by step; never take short cuts. Let us read the girl's letter again." And he did so carefully, painstakingly, folding it up afterwards with slow deliberation, while he reflected over the contents.

"I'm a-thinkin'," said he, at last—"I'm a-thinkin' how we might utilize that stranger there, the fellow as is come from Florence, and who may possibly have heard something of this girl's history. *He* don't take to *me;* nor, for the matter o' that, do *I* to *him*. But that don't signify; there's one platform brings all manner of folk together—it's the great leveller in this world—Play. Ay, sir, your English lord has no objection to even Uncle Sam's dollars, though he'd be riled con-siderable if you asked him to sit down to meals with him. I'll jest let this crittur plunder me a bit; I'll flatter him with the notion that he's too sharp and too spry for the Yankee. He's always goin' about asking every one 'Can't they make a game o' brag?' Well, I'll go in, sir. *He* shall have his game, and *I*'ll have mine."

Layton did not certainly feel much confidence in the plan of campaign thus struck out; but seeing the pleasure Quackinboss felt in the display of his acuteness, he offered no objection to the project.

"Yes, sir," continued Quackinboss, as though reflecting aloud, "once these sort of critturs think a man a flat, they let out all about how sharp they are themselves; they can't help it; it's part of their shallow natur' to be boastful. Let us see, now, what it is we want to find out: first of all, the widow, who she is and whence she came; then, how she

chanced to have the gal with her, and who the gal herself is, where she was raised, and by whom; and, last of all, what is't they done with her, how they've fixed her. Ay, sir," mused he, after a pause, "as Senator Byles says, 'if *I* don't draw the badger, I'd beg the honourable gentleman to b'lieve that his own claws ain't sharp enough to do it!' There's the very crittur himself, now, a-smokin'," cried he; "I'll jest go and ask him for a weed." And, so saying, Quackinboss crossed the deck and joined the stranger.

CHAPTER XL.

QUACKINBOSSIANA.

On the morning on which the great steamer glided within the tranquil waters of Long Island, Quackinboss appeared at Layton's berth to announce the fact, as well as report progress with the stranger. "I was right, sir," said he; "he's been and burnt his fingers on 'Change; that's the reason he's here. The crittur was in the share-market, and got his soup too hot! You Britishers seem to have the bright notion that, when you've been done at home, you'll be quite sharp enough to do us here, and so, whenever you make a grand smash in Leadenhall Street, it's only coming over to Broadway! Well, now, sir, that's con-siderable of a mistake; we understand smashing too—ay, and better than folk in the old country. Look you here, sir; if I mean to lose my ship on the banks, or in an ice drift, or any other way, I don't go and have her built of strong oak plank and well-seasoned timber, copper fastened, and the rest of it; but I run her up with light pine, and cheap fixin's everywhere. She not only goes to pieces the quicker, but there ain't none of her found to tell where it happened, and how. That's how it comes *we* founder, and there's no noise made about it; while one of your chaps goes bumpin' on the rocks for weeks, with fellows up in the riggin', and life-boats takin' 'em off, and such-like, till the town talks of nothing else, and all the news-

papers are filled with pathetic incidents, so that the very fellows that caulked her seams or wove her canvas are held up to public reprobation. That's how you do it, sir, and that's where you're wrong. When a man builds a card-house, he don't want iron fastenings. I've explained all to that crittur there, and he seems to take it in wonderful."

"Who is he—what is he?" asked Layton.

"His name's Trover; firm, Trover, Twist, and Co., Frankfort and Florence, bankers, general merchants, rag exporters, commission agents, doing a bit in the picture line and marble for the American market, and sole agents for the sale of Huxley's tonic balsam. That's how he is," said the Colonel, reading the description from his note-book.

"I never heard of him before."

"He knows you, though—knew you the moment he came aboard; said you was tutor to a lord in Italy, and that he cashed you circular notes on Stanbridge and Sawley. These fellows forget nobody."

"What does he know of the Heathcotes?"

"Pretty nigh everything. He knows that the old baronet would be for makin' a fortune out of his ward's money, and has gone and lost a good slice of it, and that the widow has been doin' a bit of business in the share-market, in the same profitable fashion—not but she's a rare wide-awake 'un, and sees into the 'exchanges' clear enough. As to the gal, he thinks she sold her——"

"Sold her! what do you mean?" cried Layton, in a voice of horror.

"Jest this, that one of those theatrical fellows as buys singing people, and gets 'em taught—it's all piping-bullfinch work with 'em—has been and taken her away; most probably cheap, too, for Trover said she wasn't nowise a rare article; she had a will of her own, and was as likely to say 'I won't,' as 'I will.'"

"Good Heavens! And are things like this suffered—are they endured in the age we live in?"

"Yes, sir. You've got all your British sympathies very full about negroes and 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' you're wonderful strong about slavery and our tyrants down South, and you've something like fifty thousand born ladies, called governesses, treated worse than housemaids, and some ten thousand others condemned to what I won't speak of, that they may amuse you in your theatres. I can tell you, sir, that the Legrees that walk St. James's Street and Piccadilly are jest as black-hearted as the fellows in Georgia or

Alabama, though they carry gold-headed walking-sticks instead of cow-hides."

"But sold her!" reiterated Layton. "Do you mean to say that Clara has been given over to one of these people to prepare her for the stage?"

"Yes, sir: he says his name's Stocmar—a real gentleman, he calls him, with a house at Brompton, and a small yacht at Cowes. They've rather good notions about enjoying themselves, these theatre fellows. They get a very good footing in West-end life, too, by supplying countesses to the nobility."

"No, no!" cried Layton, angrily; "you carry your prejudices against birth and class beyond reason and justice too."

"Well, I suspect not, sir," said Quackinboss, slowly. "Not to say that I wasn't revilin', but rather a-praisin' 'em, for the supply of so much beauty to the best face-market in all Europe. If I were to say what's the finest prerogatives of one of your lords, I know which I'd name, sir, and it wouldn't be wearin' a blue ribbon, and sittin' on a carved oak bench in what you call the Upper House of Parliament."

"But Clara—what of Clara?" cried Layton, impatiently.

"He suspects that she's at Milan, a sort of female college they have there, where they take degrees in singin' and dancin'. All I hope is that the poor child won't learn any of their confounded lazy Italian notions. There's no people can prosper, sir, when their philosophy consists in '*Come si fa?*' *Come si fa?* means, it's no use to work, it's no good to strive; the only thing to do in life is to lie down in the shade and suck oranges. That's the real reason they like Popery, sir, because they can even go to heaven without trouble, by paying another man to do the prayin' for 'em. It ain't much trouble to hire a saint, when it only costs lighting a candle to him. And to tell me that's a nation want's liberty and free institutions! No man wants liberty, sir, that won't work for his bread; no man really cares for freedom till he's ready to earn his livin', for this good reason, that the love of liberty must grow out of personal independence, as you'll see, sir, when you take a walk yonder." And he pointed to the tall steeples of New York as he spoke. But Layton cared little for the discussion of such a theme; his thoughts had another and a very different direction.

"Poor Clara," muttered he. "How is she to be rescued from such a destiny?"

"*I*'d say by the energy and determination of the man who cares for her," said Quackinboss, boldly. "*Come si fa?* won't save her, that's certain."

"Can you learn anything of the poor child's history from this man, or does he know it?"

"Well, sir," drawled out the Colonel, "that ain't so easy to say. Whether a man has a partic'lar piece of knowledge in his head, or whether a quartz rock has a streak of gold inside of it, is things only to be learned in the one way—by hammering—ay, sir, by hammering! Now, it strikes me this Trover don't like hammering; first of all, the sight of you here has made him suspicious——"

"Not impossible is it that he may have seen you also, Colonel," broke in Layton.

"Well, sir," said the other, drawing himself proudly up, "and if he had, what of it? You don't fancy that *we* are like the Britishers? You don't imagine that when we appear in Eu-rōpe that every one turns round and whispers, 'That's a gentleman from the United States?' No, sir, it is the remarkable gift of our people to be cosmopolite. We pass for Russian, French, Spanish, or Italian, jest as we like, not from our skill in language, which we do not all possess, so much as a certain easy imitation of the nat-īve that comes nat'ral to us. Even our Western people, sir, with very remarkable features of their own, have this property; and you may put a man from Kentucky down on the Boulevard de Gand to-morrow, and no one will be able to say he warn't a born Frenchman!"

"I certainly have not made that observation hitherto," said Layton, dryly.

"Possibly not, sir, because your national pride is offended by our never imitating *you!* No, sir, we never do that!"

"But won't you own that you might find as worthy models in England as in France or Italy?"

"Not for us, sir—not for us. Besides, we find ourselves at home on the Continent; we don't with *you*. The Frenchman is never taxing us with every little peculiarity of accent or diction; he's not always criticizing our ways where they differ from his own. Now, your people do, and, do what we may, sir, they will look on us as what the Chinese call 'second chop.' Now, to my thinking, we are first chop, sir, and you are the tea after second watering."

They were now rapidly approaching the only territory in which an unpleasant feeling was possible between them. Each knew and felt this, and yet, with a sort of national stub-

bornness, neither liked to be the one to recede first. As for Layton, bound as he was by a debt of deep gratitude to the American, he chafed under the thought of sacrificing even a particle of his country's honour to the accident of his own condition, and with a burning cheek and flashing eye he began,—

"There can be no discussion on the matter. Between England and America there can no more be a question as to supremacy——"

"There, don't say it; stop there," said Quackinboss, mildly. "Don't let us get warm about it. I may like to sit in a rockin'-chair and smoke my weed in the parlour; you may prefer to read the *Times* at the drawing-room fire; but if we both agree to go out into the street together, sir, we can whip all cre-ātion." And he seized Layton's hand, and wrung it with an honest warmth that there was no mistaking.

"And now as to this Mr. Trover," said Layton, after a few minutes. "Are we likely to learn anything from him?"

"Well, sir," said the Colonel, lazily, "I'm on his track, and I know his footmarks so well now, that I'll be sure to detect him if I see him again. He's a-goin' South, and so are *we*. He's a-looking out for land; that's exactly what *we*'re arter!"

"You have dropped no hint about our lecturing scheme?" asked Layton, eagerly.

"I rayther think not, sir," said the other, half indignant at the bare suspicion. "We're two gentlemen on the search after a good location and a lively water power. We've jest heard of one down West, and there's the whole cargo as per invoice." And he gave a knowing wink and look of mingled drollery and cunning.

"You are evidently of opinion that this man could be of use to us?" said Layton, who was well aware how fond the American was of acting with a certain mystery, and who, therefore, cautiously abstained from any rash assault upon his confidence.

"Yes, sir, that's *my* ticket; but I mean to take my own time to lay the bill on the table. But here comes the small steamers and the boats for the mails. Listen to that bugle, Britisher. That air is worth all Mozart. Yes, sir," said he, proudly, as he hummed,—

"There's not a man beneath the moon,
Nor lives in any land he
That hasn't heard the pleasant tune
Of Yankee doodle dandy!

"In coolin' drinks, and clipper ships,
The Yankee has the way shown!
On land and sea 'tis he that whips
Old Bull and all cre-ation."

Quackinboss gradually dropped his voice, till at the concluding line the words sank into an undistinguishable murmur, for now, as it were on the threshold of his own door, he felt all the claim of courtesy to the stranger. Still it was not possible for him to repress the proud delight he felt in the signs of wealth and prosperity around him.

"There," cried he, with enthusiasm, "there ain't a land in the universe—that's worth calling a land—hasn't a flag flying yonder! There's every colour of bunting, from Lapland to Shanghai, afloat in them waters, sir; and yet you'll not have to go back two hundred years, and where you see the smoke risin' from ten thousand human dwellin's there wasn't one hearth nor one home! The black pine and the hemlock grew down those grassy slopes where you see them gardens, and the red glare of the Indian's fire shone out where the lighthouse now points to safety and welcome! It ain't a despicable race as has done all that! If that be not the work of a great people, I'd like to hear what is!" He next pointed out to Layton the various objects of interest as they presented themselves to view, commenting on the very different impressions such a scene of human energy and activity is like to produce than those lands of Southern Europe from which they had lately come. "You'll never hear '*Come si fa?*' here, sir," said he, proudly. "If a man can't fix a thing aright, he'll not wring his hands and sit down to cry over it, but he'll go home to think of it at his meals, and as he lies awake o' nights; and he'll ask himself again and again, 'If there be a way o' doin' this, why can't *I* find it out as well as another?'"

It was the Colonel's belief that out of the principle of equality sprang an immense amount of that energy which develops itself in inventive ability, and he dilated on this theory for some time, endeavouring to show that the subdivision of ranks in the Old World tended largely to repress the enterprising spirit which leads men into paths previously untrodden. "That you'll see, sir, when you come to mix with our people. And now, a word of advice to you before you begin."

He drew his arm within Layton's as he said this, and led him two or three turns on the deck in silence. The subject was in some sort a delicate one, and he did not well see how

to open it without a certain risk of offending. "Here's how it is," said he at last. "Our folk isn't your folk because they speak the same language. In *your* country, your station, or condition, or whatever you like to call it, answers for you, and the individual man merges into the class he belongs to. Not so here. *We* don't care a red cent about your rank, but we want to know about you yourself! Now, you strangers mistake all that feeling, and call it impertinence and curiosity, and such-like; but it ain't anything of the kind! No, sir. It simply means what sort of knowledge, what art, or science, or labour, can you contribute to the common stock? Are you a-come amongst us to make us wiser, or richer, or thriftier, or godlier? or are you just a loafer—a mere loafer? My asking *you* on a rail-car whence you come and where you're a-goin' is no more impertinence than my inquirin' at a store whether they have got this article or that! I want to know whether you and I, as we journey together, can profit each other; whether either of us mayn't have something the other has never heard afore. He can't have travelled very far in life who hasn't picked up many an improvin' thing from men he didn't know the names on, ay, and learned many a sound lesson besides of patience, or contentment, forgiveness, and the like; and all that ain't so easy if people won't be sociable together!"

Layton nodded a sort of assent, and Quackinboss continued, in the same strain, to point out peculiarities to be observed, and tastes to be consulted, especially with reference to the national tendency to invite to "liquor," which he assured Layton by no means required a sense of thirst on his part to accede to. "You ain't always charmed when you say you are, in French, sir, and the same spirit of politeness should lead you to accept a brandy-smash without needing it, or even to drink off a cocktail when you ain't dry. After all," said he, drawing a long breath, like one summing up the pith of a discourse, "if you're a-goin' to pick holes in Yankee coats, to see all manner of things to criticize, condemn, and sneer at, if you're satisfied to describe a people by a few peculiarities which are not pleasin' to you, go ahead and abuse us; but if you'll accept honest hospitality, though offered in a way that's new and strange to you—if you'll believe in true worth and genuine loyalty of character, even though its possessor talk somewhat through the nose—then, sir, I say there ain't no fear that America will disappoint you, or that you'll be ill-treated by Americans." With this speech he turned away to look after his baggage and get ready to go ashore.

CHAPTER XLI.

QUACKINBOSS AT HOME.

Though Quackinboss understood thoroughly well that it devolved upon him to do the honours of his country to the "Britisher," he felt that, in honest fairness, the stranger ought to be free to form his impressions, without the bias that would ensue from personal attentions, while he also believed that American institutions and habits stood in need of no peculiar favour towards them to assert their own superiority.

"Don't be on the look-out, sir, for Eu-rōpean graces," he would say, "in this country, for the men that have most of 'em ain't our best people; and don't mistake the eagerness with which everybody will press you to admire America for any slight towards the old country. We all like her, sir; and we'd like her better if she wasn't so fond of saying she's ashamed of us."

These were the sort of warnings and counsels he would drop as he guided Layton about through the city, pointing out whatever he deemed most worthy of curiosity, or whatever he conceived might illustrate the national character. It was chiefly on the wealth of the people, their untiring industry, and the energy with which they applied themselves to money-getting, that he laid stress, and he did this with a degree of insistance that betrayed an uneasy consciousness of how little sympathy such traits meet with from the passing traveller.

"Mayhap, sir, you'd rather see 'em loafing?" said he, one day, in a moment of impatience, as Layton half confessed that he'd like to meet some of the men of leisure. "Well, you'll have to look 'em up elsewhere, I expect. I'll have to take you a run down South for that sort of cattle—and that's what I mean to do. Before you go before our people, sir, as a lecturer, you'll have to study 'em a little, that's a fact! When you come to know 'em, you'll see that it's a folk won't be put off with chaff when they want buckwheat; and that's jest what your Eu-rōpeans think to do. I will take a trip to

the Falls first; I'd like to show you that water-power. We start away on Monday next."

Layton was not sorry to leave New York. The sight of that ever busy multitude, that buzzing hive of restless bees, was only addling to one who never regarded wealth save as a stage to something farther off. He was well aware how rash it would be to pronounce upon a people from the mere accidents of chance intercourse, and he longed to see what might give him some real insight into the character of the nation. Besides this, he felt, with all the poignant susceptibility of his nature, that he was not himself the man to win success amongst them. There was a bold rough energy, a daring go-ahead spirit, that overbore him wherever he went. They, who had not travelled, spoke more confidently of foreign lands than he who had seen them. Of the very subjects he had made his own by study, he heard men speak with a confidence he would not have dared to assume; and lastly, the reserve which serves as a sanctuary to the bashful man, was invaded without scruple by any one who pleased it.

If each day's experience confirmed him in the impression that he was not one to gain their suffrages, he was especially careful to conceal this discouraging conviction from Quackinboss, leaving to time, that great physician, to provide for the future. Nor was the Colonel himself, be it owned, without his own misgivings. He saw, to his amazement, that the qualities which he had so much admired in Layton won no approval from his countrymen; the gifts, which by reading and reflection he had cultivated, seemed not to be marketable commodities; there were no buyers—none wanted them. Now Quackinboss began to think seriously over their project, deeply pained as he remembered that it was by his own enthusiastic description of his countrymen the plan had first met acceptance. Whether it was that the American mind had undergone some great change since he had known it, or that foreign travel had exaggerated, in his estimation, the memory of many things he had left behind him; but so it was, the Colonel was amazed to discover that with all the traits of sharp intelligence and activity he recognized in his countrymen, there were yet some features in the society of the old continent that he regretted and yearned after. Again and again did he refer to Italy and their life there; even the things he had so often condemned now came up, softened by time and distance, as pleasant memories of an era passed in great enjoyment. If any passing trait in the scenery recalled the classic land, he never failed to remark it, and once

launched upon the theme, he would talk away for hours of the olive-woods, the trellised vines, the cottages half hid amidst the orange-groves, showing how insensibly the luxurious indolence he had imbibed lingered like a sort of poison in his blood.

"Yes, sir," said he, one day, as with an amount of irritation he acknowledged the fatal fascination of that land of dreamy inactivity, "it's *my* notion that Italy is a pasture where no beast ought to be turned out that's ever to do any work again. It ain't merely that one does nothing when he's there, but he ain't fit for anything when he leaves it. I know what I'd have thought of any man that would have said to *me*, 'Shaver Quackinboss, you'll come out of them diggin's lazy and indolent. You'll think more of your ease than you ought, and you'll be more grateful for being jest left alone to follow your own fancies than for the best notion of speculation that ever was hit upon.' And that's exactly what I've come to! I don't want a fellow to tell me where I can make thirty or forty thousand dollars; I've lost all that spring in me that used to make me rise early and toil late. What I call happiness now is to sit and smoke with one of your sort of an afternoon, and listen to stories of chaps that lived long ago, and worked their way on in a world a precious sight harder to bully than our own. Well now, sir, I say, that ain't right, and it ain't nat'ral, and, what's more, I ain't a-goin' to bear it. I mean to be stirrin' and active again, and you'll see it."

It was a few days after he had made this resolve that he said to Layton,—

"Only think who I saw at the bar this morning. That fellow we came over with in the passage out; he was a-liquoring down there and treating all the company. He comes up to me, straight on end, and says,—

"'Well, old 'oss, and how do *you* get on?'

"'Bobbish-like,' says I, for I was minded to be good-humoured with him, and see what I could get out of him about hisself.

"'Where's the young 'un I saw with you aboard?' says he.

"'Well,' said I, 'he ain't very far off, when he's wanted.'

"'That's what he ain't,' said he; 'he ain't wanted nowhere.' When he said this, I saw he was very 'tight,' as we call it —far gone in liquor, I mean.

"'Have you found out that same water-power you were arter?' said he.

"'No,' said I. 'It's down West a man must go who hasn't a bag full of dollars. Everything up hereabouts is bought up at ten times its worth.'

"'Well, look sharp after the young 'un,' said he, laughing; 'that's *my* advice to you. Though you're Yankee, he'll be too much for you in the end.' He said this, drinking away all the time, and getting thicker in his speech at every word.

"'I ain't a man to neglect a warnin',' says I, in a sort of whisper, 'and if *you* mean friendly by me, speak out.'

"'And ain't that speaking out,' says he, boldly, 'when I say to a fellow I scarcely know by sight, "Mind your eye; look out for squalls!" I wonder what more he wants? Does he expect me to lend him money?' said he, with an insolent laugh.

"'No,' said I, in the same easy way, 'by no manner o' means; and if it's myself you allude to, I ain't in the vocative case, sir. I've got in that old leather pocket-book quite enough for present use.'

"'Watch it well, then; put it under your head o' nights, that's all,' said he, hiccupping, 'and if you wake up some morning without it, don't say the fault was Oliver Trover's.' This was a-tellin' me his name, which I remembered the moment I heard it.

"'You'll take a brandy-smash or a glass of bitters with *me* now, sir?' said I, hopin' to get something more out of him; but he wouldn't have it. He said, with a half-cunning leer, 'No more liquor, no more liquor, and no more secrets! If you was to treat me to all in the bar, you'd get nothing more out of Noll Trover.'"

"But what does the fellow mean by his insinuations about me?" said Layton, angrily. "I never knew him, never met him, never so much as heard of him!"

"What does that signify if he has heard of *you*, and suspects you to know something about *him?* He ain't all right, that's clear enough; but our country is so full of fellows like that, it ain't easy work tracking 'em."

Layton shrugged his shoulders with an indifference, as though to say the matter did not interest him, but Quackinboss rejoined quickly, "I've a notion that it concerns us, sir. I heerd his inquiry about all the lines down South, and asking if any one knew a certain Harvey Winthrop, down at Norfolk."

"Winthrop — Winthrop? Where have I heard that name?"

"In that book of your father's—don't you remember it?

It was he was mentioned as the guardian of that young girl, the daughter of him as was pisoned at Jersey."

"And is this man Trover in search of Winthrop?" asked Layton, eagerly.

"Well, he's a-lookin' arter him, somehow, that's certain; for when somebody said, 'Oh, Harvey Winthrop ain't at Norfolk now,' he looked quite put out and amazed, and muttered something about having made all his journey for nothing."

"It is strange, indeed, that we should have the same destination, and stranger still would it be if we should be both on the same errand."

"Well," said Quackinboss, after a long pause, "I've been a-rolling the log over and over, to see which way to cut it, and at last, I believe, I've found the right side o' it. You and I must quarrel."

"What do you mean?" asked Layton, in astonishment.

"I mean jest this. I must take up the suspicion that he has about *you*, and separate from you. It may be to join *him*. He's one of your Old-World sort, that's always so proud to be reckoned 'cute and smart, that you've only to praise his legs to get his leggin's. We'll be as thick as thieves arter a week's travelling, and I'll find out all that he's about. Trust Old Shaver, sir, to get to windward of small craft like that!"

"I own to you frankly," said Layton, "that I don't fancy using a rogue's weapons even against a rogue."

"Them's not the sentiments of the men that made laws, sir," said Quackinboss. "Laws is jest rogues' weapons against rogues. You want to do something you haven't no right to, and straight away you discover that some fellow was so wide awake once, that he made a statute against it, ay, and so cleverly too, that he first imagined every different way you could turn your dodge, and provided for each in turn."

Layton shook his head in dissent, but could not repress a faint smile.

"Ain't it roguery to snare partridges and to catch fish, for the matter o' that?" said he, with increased warmth. "Wherever a fellow shows hisself more 'cute than his neighbours, there's sure to be an outcry 'What a rogue he is!'"

"Your theory would be an indictment against all mankind," said Layton.

"No, sir, for *I* only call him a rogue that turns his sharpness to bad and selfish ends. Now, that's not the case with him as hunts down varmint: he's a-doin' a good work, and all the better that he may get scratched for his pains."

"Well, what is your plan?" said Layton, rather fearful of the length into which his friend's speculations occasionally betrayed him.

"Here it is, sir," said the Colonel. "I'll come down upon that crittur at Detroit, where I hear he's a-goin', and flatter him by saying, that he was all right about *you*."

"Indeed!" said Layton, laughing.

"Yes, sir," said the other, gravely. "I'll say to him, 'Stranger, you *are* a wide-awake 'un, that's a fact.' He'll rise to *that*, like a ground-shark to a leg of pork—see if he don't—and he'll go on to ask about *you;* that will give me the opportunity to give a sketch of myself, and a more simple, guileless sort of bein' you've not often heerd of than I'll turn out to be. Yes, sir, I'm one as suspects no ill of anybody, jest out of the pureness of my own heart. When we get on to a little more intimacy, I mean to show him twenty thousand dollars I've got by me, and ask his advice about investin' 'em. I guess pretty nigh what he'll say: 'Give 'em over to *me*.' Well, I'll take a bit of time to consider about that. There will be, in consequence, more intimacy and more friendship atween us: but arter he's seen the money, he'll not leave me; human natur' couldn't do *that!*"

"Shall I tell you fairly," said Layton, "that I not only don't like your scheme, but that I think it will not repay you."

"Well, sir," said Quackinboss, drawing himself up, "whenever you see *me* baitin' a rat-trap, I don't expect you'll say, 'Colonel, ain't that mean? Ain't *you* ashamed of yourself to entice that poor varmint there to his ruin? Why don't you explain to him, that if he wants that morsel of fried bacon, it will cost him pretty dear?'"

"You forget that you're begging the question. You're assuming, all this time, that this man is a rogue and a cheat."

"I am, sir," said he, firmly, "for it's not at this time o' day Shaver Quackinboss has to learn life. All the pepperin' and lemon-squeezin' in the world won't make a toad taste like a terapin: that crittur's gold chains don't impose upon *me!* You remember that he wasn't aboard four-and-twenty hours when I said, 'That sheep's mangy.'"

"Perhaps, I like your plan the less because it separates us," said Layton, who now perceived that the Colonel seemed to smart under anything that reflected on his acuteness.

"That's jest what galls me, too," said he, frankly. "It's been all sunshine in my life, since we've been together. All the book-learnin' you've got has stolen into your nature so

gradually as to make part of yourself, but what you tell *me* comes like soft rain over a dry prairie, and changing the parched soil into something that seems to say, 'I'm not so barren, after all, if I only got my turn from fortune.' You've shown me one thing, that I often had a glimmerin' of, but never saw clearly till you pointed it out, that the wisest men that ever lived felt more distrust of themselves than of their fellows. But we only part for a while, Layton. In less than a month we'll meet again, and I hope to have good news for you by that time."

"Where are we to rendezvous, then?" asked Layton, for he saw how fruitless would be the attempt at further opposition.

"I'll have the map out this evening, and we'll fix it," said the Colonel. "And now leave me to smoke, and think over what's afore us. There's great thoughts in that bit of twisted 'bacco there, if I only have the wit to trace 'em. Every man that has had to use his head in life finds out by the time he's forty what helps him to his best notions. Bonaparte used to get into a bath to think, Arkwright went to bed, and my father, Methuselah Grip Quackinboss, said he never was so bright as standing up to his neck in the mill-race, with the light spray of the wheel comin' in showers over him. 'I feel,' says he, 'as if I was one-half Lord Bacon and the other John C. Colhoun.' Now my brain-polisher is a long Cuban, a shady tree, and a look-out seaward—all the better if the only sails in sight be far away."

CHAPTER XLII.

A NEW LOCATION.

After a great deal of discussion it was agreed between Layton and the Colonel that they should meet that day month at St. Louis. Layton was to employ the interval in seeing as much as he could of the country and the people, and preparing himself to appear before them at the first favourable opportunity. Indeed, though he did not confess it, he yielded to the separation the more willingly, because it offered him the occasion of putting into execution a plan he for some time had been ruminating over. In some measure from a natural diffidence, and in a great degree from a morbid dread of disappointing the high expectations Quackinboss had formed of the success he was to obtain, Layton had long felt that the presence of his friend would be almost certain to ensure his failure. He could neither venture to essay the same flights before him, nor could he, if need were, support any coldness or disinclination of his audience were Quackinboss there to witness it. In fact, he wanted to disassociate his friend from any pain failure should occasion, and bear all alone the sorrows of defeat.

Besides this, he felt that, however personally painful the ordeal, he was bound to face it. He had accepted Quackinboss's assistance under the distinct pledge that he was to try this career. In its success was he to find the means of repaying his friend, and so confidently had the Colonel always talked of that success, it would seem mere wilfulness not to attempt it.

There is not, perhaps, a more painful position in life than to be obliged to essay a career to which all one's thoughts and instincts are opposed; to do something against which self-respect revolts, and yet meet no sympathy from others—to be conscious that any backwardness will be construed into self-indulgence, and disinclination be set down as indolence. Now this was Alfred Layton's case. He must either risk a signal failure, or consent to be thought of as one who would rather be a burden to his friends than make an honourable effort for his own support. He was already

heavily in the Colonel's debt; the thought of this weighed upon him almost insupportably. It never quitted him for an instant; and, worse than all, it obtruded through every effort he made to acquit himself of the obligation; and only they who have experienced it can know what pain brain labour becomes when it is followed amidst the cares and anxieties of precarious existence; when the student tries in vain to concentrate thoughts that *will* stray away to the miserable exigencies of his lot, or struggle hopelessly to forget himself and his condition in the interest of bygone events or unreal incidents. Let none begrudge him the few flitting moments of triumph he may win, for he has earned them by many a long hour of hardship!

The sense of his utter loneliness, often depressing and dispiriting, was now a sort of comfort to him. Looking to nothing but defeat, he was glad that there was none to share in his sorrows. Of all the world, he thought poor Clara alone would pity him. Her lot was like his own—the same friendlessness—the self-same difficulty. Why should he not have her sympathy? She would give it freely, and with her whole heart. It was but to tell her, "I am far away, and unhappy. I chafe under dependence, and I know not how to assert my freedom. I would do something, and yet I know not what it is to be. I distrust myself, and yet there are times when I feel that one spoken word would give such courage to my heart that I could go on and hope." Could she speak that word to him? was his ever present thought. He resolved to try, and accordingly wrote her a long, long letter. Full of the selfishness of one who loved, he told her the whole story of his journey, and the plan that led to it. "I have patience enough for slow toil," said he, "but I do not seek for the success it brings. I wanted the quick prosperity that one great effort might secure, and time afterwards to enjoy the humble fortune thus acquired. With merely enough for life, Clara, I meant to ask you to share it. Who are as friendlessly alone as we are? who are so bereft of what is called home? Say, have you a heart to give me—when I can claim it—and will you give it? I am low and wretched because I feel unloved. Tell me this is not so, and in the goal before me, hope and energy will come back to me." Broken and scarce coherent at times, his letter revealed one who loved her ardently, and who wanted but her pledge to feel himself happy. He pressed eagerly to know of her own life—what it was, and whether she was contented. Had she learned anything of

the mystery that surrounded her family, or could she give him the slightest clue by which he could aid her in the search? He entreated of her to write to him, even though her letter should not be the confirmation of all he wished and prayed for.

The very fact of his having written this to Clara seemed to rally his spirits. It was at least a pledge to his own heart. He had placed a goal before him, and a hope.

"I am glad to see you look cheerier," said Quackinboss, as they sat talking over their plans. "The hardest load a man ever carried is a heavy heart, and it's as true as my name's Shaver, that one gets into the habit of repinin' and seein' all things black jest as one falls into any other evil habit. Old Grip Quackinboss said, one day, to Mr. Jefferson, 'Yes, sir,' says he, 'always hearty, sir—always cheery. There's an old lady as sweeps the crossin' in our street, and I give her a quarter-dollar to fret for me, for it's a thing I've sworn never to do for myself.'"

"Well," said Layton, gaily, "you'll see I've turned over a new leaf; and whatever other thoughts you shall find in me, causeless depression shall not be of the number."

"All right, sir; that's my own platform. Now here's your instructions, for I'm a-goin'. I start at seven-forty, by the cars for Buffalo. That spot down there is our meetin'-place—St. Louis. It looks mighty insignificant on the map, there; but you'll see it's a thrivin' location, and plenty of business in it. You'll take your own time about being there, only be sure to arrive by this day month; and if I be the man I think myself, I'll have news to tell you when you come. This crittur, Trover, knows all about that Widow Morris, and the girl, too—that Clara—you was so fond of. If I have to tie him up to a tree, sir, I'll have it out of him! There's five hundred dollars in that bag. You'll not need all of it, belike, if you keep clear of 'Poker' and Bully-brag; and I advise you to, sir,—I do," said he, gravely. "It takes a man to know life, to guess some of the sharp 'uns in our river steamers. There's no other dangers to warn you of here, sir. Don't be riled about trifles, and you'll find yourself very soon at home with us."

These were his last words of counsel as he shook Layton's hand at parting. It was with a sad sense of loneliness Layton sat by his window after Quackinboss had gone. For many a month back he had had no other friend or companion: ever present to counsel, console, or direct him, the honest Yankee was still more ready with his purse than his precepts. Often

as they had differed in their opinions, not a hasty word or disparaging sentiment had ever disturbed their intercourse ; and even the Colonel's most susceptible spot—that which touched upon national characteristics — never was even casually wounded in the converse. In fact, each had learned to see with how very little forbearance in matters of no moment, and with how slight an exercise of deference for differences of object and situation, English and American could live together like brothers.

There was but one thought which embittered the relations between them, in Layton's estimation. It was the sense of that dependence which destroyed equality. He was satisfied to be deeply the debtor of his friend, but he could not struggle between what he felt to be a fitting gratitude, and that resolute determination to assert what he believed to be true at any cost. He suspected, too—and the suspicion was a very painful one—that the Colonel deemed him indolent and self-indulgent. The continued reluctance he had evinced to adventure on the scheme for which they came so far, favoured this impression.

As day after day he travelled along, one thought alone occupied him. At each place he stopped came the questions, Will this suit ? Is this the spot I am in search of ? It was strange to mark by what slight and casual events his mind was influenced. The slightest accident that ruffled him as he arrived, an insignificant inconvenience, a passing word, the look of the place, the people, the very aspect of the weather, were each enough to assure him he had not yet discovered what he sought after. It was towards the close of his fifth day's ramble that he reached the small town of Bunkumville. It was a newly-settled place, and, like all such, not over remarkable for comfort or convenience. The spot had been originally laid out as the centre of certain lines of railroad, and intended to have been a place of consequence, but the engineers who had planned it had somehow incurred disgrace, the project was abandoned, and instead of a commercial town, rich, populous, and flourishing, it now presented the aspect of a spot hastily deserted, and left to linger out an existence of decline and neglect. There were marks enough to denote the grand projects which were once entertained for the place, great areas measured off for squares, spacious streets staked off ; here and there massive " blocks " of building ; three or four hotels on a scale of vast proportion, and an assembly-room worthy of a second-rate city. With all this, the population was poor-looking and careworn. No stir of trade or

business to be met with. A stray bullock-car stole drearily along through the deep-rutted streets, or a traveller significantly armed with rifle and revolver rode by on his own raw-boned horse; but of the sights and sounds of town life and habits there were none. Of the hotels, two were closed; the third was partially occupied as a barrack, by a party of cavalry despatched to repress some Indian outrages on the frontier. Even the soldiers had contracted some of the wild, out-of-the-world look of the place, and wore their belts over buckskin jackets, that smacked more of the prairie than the parade. The public conveyance which brought Layton to the spot only stopped long enough to bait the horses and refresh the travellers; and it was to the no small surprise of the driver that he saw the "Britisher" ask for his portmanteau, with the intention of halting there. "Well, you ain't a-goin' to injure your constitution with gaiety and late hours, stranger," said he, as he saw him descend; "that's a fact."

Nor was the sentiment one that Layton could dispute, as, still standing beside his luggage in the open street, he watched the stage till it disappeared in the distant pine forest. Two or three lounging, lazy-looking inhabitants had, meanwhile, come up, and stood looking with curiosity at the new arrival.

"You ain't a valuator, are you?" asked one, after a long and careful inspection of him.

"No," said Layton, dryly.

"You're a-lookin' for a saw-mill, I expect," said another, with a keen glance as he spoke.

"Nor that, either," was the answer.

"*I* have it," broke in a third; "you've got 'notions' in that box, there, but it won't do down here; we've got too much bark to hew off before we come to such fixin's."

"I suspect you are not nearer the mark than your friends, sir," said Layton, still repressing the slightest show of impatience.

"What'll you lay, stranger, I don't hit it?" cried a tall, thin, bold-looking fellow, with long hair falling over his neck. "You're a preacher, ain't you? You're from the New England States, I'll be bound. Say I'm right, sir, for you know I am."

"I must give it against you, sir, also," said Layton, preserving his gravity with an effort that was not without difficulty. "I do not follow any one of the avocations you mention; but, in return for your five questions, may I make bold to ask one? Which is the hotel here?"

"It's yonder," said the tall man, pointing to a large house,

handsomely pillared, and overgrown with the luxuriant foliage of the red acanthus; "there it is. That's the Temple of Epicurus, as you see it a-written up. You ain't for speculatin' in that sort, are you?"

"No," said Layton, quietly; "I was merely asking for a house of entertainment."

"You're a Britisher, I reckon," said one of the former speakers; "that's one of *their* words for meat and drink."

Without waiting for any further discussion of himself, his country, or his projects, Layton walked towards the hotel. From the two upper tiers of windows certain portions of military attire, hung out to air or to dry, undeniably announced a soldierly occupation; cross-belts, overalls, and greatcoats hung gracefully suspended on all sides. Lower down, there was little evidence of habitation; most of the windows were closely shuttered, and through such as were open Layton saw large and lofty rooms, totally destitute of furniture and in part unfinished. The hall-door opened upon a spacious apartment, at one side of which a bar had been projected, but the plan had gone no further than a long counter and some shelves, on which now a few bottles stood in company, with three or four brass candlesticks, a plaster bust, wanting a nose, and some cooking utensils. On the counter itself was stretched at full length, and fast asleep, a short somewhat robust man, in shirt and trousers, his deep snoring awaking a sort of moaning echo in the vaulted room. Not exactly choosing to disturb his slumbers, if avoidable, Layton pushed his explorations a little further, but though he found a number of rooms, all open, they were alike empty and unfinished, nor was there a creature to be met with throughout. There was, then, nothing for it but to awaken the sleeper, which he proceeded to, at first, by gentle, but, as these failed, by more vigorous means.

"Don't! I say," growled out the man, without opening his eyes, but seeming bent on continuing his sleep; "I'll not have it—let me be—that's all."

"Are you the landlord of this hotel?" said Layton, with a stout shake by the shoulder.

"Well, then, here's for it, if you will!" cried the other, springing up, and throwing himself in an instant into a boxing attitude, while his eyes glared with a vivid wildness, and his whole face denoted passion.

"I came here for food and lodging, and not for a boxing-match, my friend," said Layton, mildly.

"And who said I was your friend?" said the other,

fiercely; "who told *you* that we was raised in the same diggin's? and what do you mean, sir, by disturbin' a gentleman in his bed?"

"You'll scarcely call that bench a bed, I think?" said Layton, in an accent meant to deprecate all warmth.

"And why not, sir? If you choose to dress yourself like a chequer-board, I'm not going to dispute whether you have a coat on. It's *my* bed, and I like it. And now what next?"

"I'm very sorry to have disturbed you; and if you can only tell me if there be any other hotel in this place——"

"There ain't; and there never will be, that's more. Elsmore's is shut up; Chute Melchin's a-blown his brains out: and so would *you* if you'd have come here. Don't laugh, or by the everlastin' rattlesnake, I'll bowie you!"

The madly-excited look of the man, his staring eyes, retreating forehead, and restless features, made Layton suspect he was insane, and he would gladly have retired from an interview that promised so little success, but the other walked deliberately round, and barring the passage to the door, stood with his arms crossed before him.

"You think I don't know you, but I do; I heerd of you eight weeks ago; I knew you was comin', but darm me all blue if you shall have it. Come out into the orchard—come out, I say, and let's see who's the best man. *You* think you'll come here and make this like the Astor House, don't ye? and there'll be five or six hundred every night pressing up to the bar for bitters and juleps, just because you have the place? But I say Dan Heron ain't a-goin' to quit; he stands here like old Hickory in the mud-fort, and says, try and turn me out."

By the time the altercation had reached thus far, Layton saw that a crowd of some five-and-twenty or thirty persons had assembled outside the door, and were evidently enjoying the scene with no common zest. Indeed, their mutterings of "Dan's a-givin' it to him," "Dan's full steam up," and so on, showed where their sympathies inclined. Some, however, more kindly-minded, and moved by the unfriended position of the stranger, good-naturedly interposed, and having obtained Layton's sincere and willing assurance that he never harboured a thought of becoming proprietor of the Temple, nor had he the very vaguest notion of settling down at Bunkumville in any capacity, peace was signed, and Mr. Heron consented to receive him as a guest.

Taking a key from a nail on the wall, Dan Heron preceded

him to a small chamber, where a truckle-bed, a chair, and a basin on the floor formed the furniture; but he promised a table, and if the stay of the stranger warranted the trouble, some other "fixin's" in a day or two.

"You can come and eat a bit with me about sun-down," said Dan, doggedly, as he withdrew, for he was not yet quite satisfied what projects the stranger nursed in his bosom.

Resolved to make the best of a situation not over-promising, to go with the humour of his host so far as he could, and even, where possible, try and derive some amusement from his eccentricities, Layton presented himself punctually at meal-time. The supper was laid out in a large kitchen, where an old negress officiated as cook. It was abundant and savoury; there was every imaginable variety of bread, and the display of dishes was imposing. The circumstance was, however, explained by Heron's remarking that it was the supper of the officers of the detachment they were eating, a sudden call to the frontier having that same morning arrived, and to this lucky accident were they indebted for this abundance.

An apple-brandy "smash" of Mr. Heron's own devising wound up the meal, and the two lighted their cigars, and in all the luxurious ease of their rocking-chairs, enjoyed their post-prandial elysium.

"Them boots of yours is English make," was Mr. Heron's first remark, after a long pause.

"Yes, London," was the brief reply.

"I've been there—I don't like it."

Layton muttered some expression of regret at this sentiment, but the other not heeding went on:

"I've seen most parts of the world, but there ain't anything to compare with this."

Layton was not certain whether it was the supremacy of America he asserted, or the city of Bunkumville in particular, but he refrained from inquiring, preferring to let the other continue; nor did he seem at all unwilling. He went on to give a half-connected account of a migratory adventurous sort of life at home and abroad. He had been a cook on shipboard, a gold-digger, an auctioneer, a showman, dealt in almost every article of commerce, smuggled opium into China and slaves into New Orleans, and with all his experiences had somehow or the other not hit upon the right road to fortune. Not indeed that he distrusted his star—far from it. He believed himself reserved for great things, and

never felt more certain of being within their reach than at this moment.

"It was I made this city we're in, sir," said he, proudly. "I built all that mass yonder—Briggs-block; I built the house we're sitting in; I built that Apollonicon, the music-hall you saw as you came in, and I lectured there, too; and if it were not for an old 'rough' that won't keep off his bitters early of a mornin', I'd be this day as rich as John Jacob Astor: that's what's ruined me, sir. I brought him from New York with me down here, and there's nothing from a birdcage to a steam-boiler that fellow can't make you when he's sober—ay, and describe it, too. If you only heerd him talk! Well, he made a telegraph here, and set two saw-mills a-goin', and made a măchine for getting the salt out of that lake yonder, and then took to manufacturin' maccaroni and gunpowder, and some dye stuff out of oak bark; and what will you say, stranger, when I tell you that he sold each of these inventions for less than gave him a week's carouse. And now I have him here under lock and key, waiting till he comes to hisself, which he's rather long about this time."

"Is he ill?" asked Layton.

"Well, you can't say exactly he's all right; he gave hisself an ugly gash with a case-knife on the neck, and tried to blow hisself up arter with some combustible stuff, so that he's rather black about the complexion; and then he's always a-screechin' and yellin' for drink, but I go in at times with a heavy whip, and he ain't unreasonable then."

"He's mad, in fact," said Layton, gravely.

"I only wish you and I was as sane, stranger," said the other. "There ain't that place on the globe old Poll, as we call him, couldn't make a livin' in; he's a man as could help a minister with his discourse, or teach a squaw how to work mocassins. I don't know what *your* trade is, but I'll be bound he knows something about it *you* never heerd of."

Mr. Heron went on to prove how universally gifted his friend was by mentioning how, on his first arrival, he gave a course of lectures on a plan which assuredly might have presented obstacles to many. It was only when the room was filled, and the public itself consulted, that the theme of the lecture was determined, so that the speaker was actually called upon, without a moment for preparation, to expatiate upon any given subject. Nor was the test less trying that the hearers were plain practical folk, who usually propounded questions in which they possessed some knowledge themselves. How to open

a new clearing, what treatment to apply to the bite of the whipsnake, by what contrivance to economize water in mills, how to tan leather without oak bark—such, and such-like, were the theses placed before him, matters on which the public could very sufficiently pronounce themselves. Old Poll, it would seem, had sustained every test, and come through every ordeal of demand victorious. While the host thus continued to expatiate on this man's marvellous gifts, Layton fell a-thinking whether this might not be the very spot he sought for, and this the audience before whom he could experiment on as a public speaker. It was quite evident that the verdict could confer little either of distinction or disparagement: success or failure were, as regarded the future, not important. If, however, he could succeed in interesting them at all—if he could make the themes of which they had never so much as heard in any way amusing or engaging—it would be a measure of what he might attain with more favourable hearers. He at once propounded his plan to Mr. Heron, not confessing, however, that he meditated a first attempt, but speaking as an old and practised lecturer.

"What can you give 'em, sir? They're horny-handed and flat-footed folk down here, but they'll not take an old hen for a Bucks county chicken, I tell *you!*"

"I am a little in your friend Poll's line," said Layton, good-humouredly. "I could talk to them about history, and long ago; what kind of men ruled amongst Greeks and Romans; what sort of wars they waged; how they colonized, and what they did with the conquered. If my hearers had patience for it, I could give them some account of their great orators and poets."

Heron shook his head dissentingly, and said Poll told 'em all that, and nobody wanted it, till he came to them chaps they call the gladiators, and showed how they used to spar and hit out. "Wasn't it grand to see him, with his great chest and strong old arms, describin' all their movements, and how much they trusted to activity, imitating all from the wild beast—not like our boxers, who make fighting a reg'lar man's combat. You couldn't take up that, could you?"

"I fear not," said Layton, despondingly.

"Well, tell 'em something of the old country in a time near their own. They'd like to hear about their great-grandfathers and grandmothers."

"Would they listen to me if I made Ireland the subject—Ireland just before she was incorporated with England, when, with a Parliament of her own, she had a resident gentry,

separate institutions, and strong traits of individual nationality?"

"Tell 'em about fellows that had strong heads and stout hands, that, though they mightn't always be right in their opinions, was willing and ready to fight for 'em. Give 'em a touch of the way they talked in their House of Parliament, and if you can bring in a story or two, and make 'em laugh —it ain't a'ways easy to do—but if you *can* do it, you may travel from Cape Cod to the Gulf of Mexico and never change a dollar."

"Here goes, then! I'll try it!" said Layton, at once determined to risk the effort. "When can it be?"

"It must be at once, for there's a number of 'em a-goin' West next week. Say to-morrow night, seven o'clock. Entrance, twelve cents; first chairs, five-and-twenty. No smokin' allowed, except between the acts."

"Take all the arrangements on yourself, and give me what you think fair of our profits," said Layton.

"That's reasonable; no man can say it ain't. What's your name, stranger?"

"My name is Alfred—— But never mind my name; announce me as a Gentleman from England."

"Who has lectured before the Queen and Napoleon Bonaparte."

"Nay, that I have never done."

"Well, but you might, you know; and if you didn't the greater loss theirs."

"Perhaps so; but I can't consent——"

"Just leave them things to me. And now, one hint for yourself: when you're a-windin' up, dash it all with a little soft sawder, sayin' as how you'd rather be addressin' *them* than the Emperor of Roosia—that the sight of men as loves liberty, and knows how to keep it, is as good as Peat's vegetable balsam, that warms the heart without feverin' the blood—and that wherever you go the 'membrance of the city and its enlightened citizens will be the same as photographed on your heart—that there's men here ought to be in Congress, and women fit for queens! And if you throw in a bit of the star-spangled—you know what—it'll do no harm."

Layton only smiled at these counsels, offered, however, in a spirit far from jesting; and after a little further discussion of the plan, Heron said, "Oh, if we only could get old Poll bright enough to write the placards—that's what he excels in—there ain't his equal for capitals anywhere."

Though Layton felt very little desire to have the individual

referred to associated with him or his scheme, he trusted to the impossibility of the alliance, and gave himself no trouble to repudiate it; and, after a while, they parted, with a good night and hope for the morrow.

CHAPTER XLIII.

BUNKUMVILLE

"You wouldn't believe it—no one would believe it," said Mr. Heron, as he hastily broke in upon Layton the next morning, deep in preperations for the coming event. "There's old Poll all spry and right again; he asked for water to shave himself, an invariable sign with him that he was a-goin' to try a new course."

Layton, not caring to open again what might bear upon this history, merely asked some casual question upon the arrangements for the evening; but Heron rejoined: "I told Poll to do it all. The news seemed to revive him, and far from, as I half dreaded, any jealousy about another taking his place, he said, 'This looks like a promise of better things down here. If our Bunkumville folk will only encourage lecturers to come amongst them, their tone of thinking and speaking will improve. They'll do their daily work in a better spirit, and enjoy their leisure with a higher zest."

"Strange sentiments from one such as you pictured to me last night."

"Lord love ye, that's his way. He beats all the Temperance 'Postles about condemning drink. He can tell more anecdotes of the mischief it works, explain better its evil on the health, and the injury it works in a man's natur', than all the talkers ever came out of the Mayne Convention."

"Which scarcely says much for the force of his convictions," said Layton, smiling.

"I only wish he heard you say so, Britisher; if he wouldn't chase you up a pretty high tree, call *me* a land crab! I remember well, one night, how he lectured on that very point, and showed that what was vulgarly called hypocrisy

was jest neither more nor less than a diseased and exaggerated love of approbation—them's his words; I took 'em down and showed 'em to him next morning, and all he said was, 'I suppose I said it arter dinner.'"

"Am I to see your friend and make his acquaintance?" asked Layton.

"Well," said the other, with some hesitation, "I rayther suspect not; he said as much that he didn't like meeting any one from the old country. It's my idea that he warn't over well treated there, somehow, though he won't say it."

"But as one who has never seen him before, and in all likelihood is never to see him again——"

"No use; whenever he makes up his mind in that quiet way he never changes, and he said, 'I'll do all you want, only don't bring me forward. I have my senses now, and shame is one of 'em!'"

"You increase my desire to see and know this poor fellow."

"Mayhap you're a-thinkin', Britisher, whether, if you could wile him away from *me*, you couldn't do a good stroke of work with him down South—eh? wasn't that it?"

"No, on my word; nothing of the kind. My desire was simply to know if I couldn't serve him where he was, and where he is probably to remain."

"Where he is sartainly to remain, I'd say, sir—sartainly to remain! I'd rayther give up the Temple, ay, and all the fixin's, than I'd give up that man. There ain't one spot in creation he ain't fit for. Take him North, and he'll beat all the Abolitionists ever talked; bring him down to the old South State, and hear him how he'll make out that the Bible stands by slavery, and that Blacks are to Whites what children are to their elders—a sort of folk to be fed, and nourished, and looked arter, and, maybe, cor-rected a little betimes. Fetch him up to Lowell, and he'll teach the factory folk in their own mills; and as to the art of stump-raisin', rotation of crops in a new soil, fattenin' hogs, and curin' salmon, jest show me one to compare with him!"

"How sad that such a man should be lost?" said Layton, half to himself.

But the other overheard him, and rejoined: "It's always with some sentiment of that kind you Britishers work out something for your own benefit. You never conquer a new territory except to propagate trial by jury and habeas corpus. Now look out here, for I won't stand you're steppin' in 'tween *me* and old Poll."

It was not enough for Layton to protest that he harboured

no such intentions. Mr. Heron's experiences of mankind had inspired very different lessons than those of trust and confidence, and he secretly determined that no opportunity should be given to carry out the treason he dreaded.

"When the lecturin'-room is a-clean swept out and dusted, the table placed, and the black-board with a piece of chalk a-hind it, and the bills a-posted, setting forth what you're a-goin' to stump out, there ain't no need for more. If *you*'ve got the stuff in you to amuse our folk, you'll see the quarter dollars a rollin' in, in no time! If they think, however, that you're only come here to sell 'em grit for buckwheat, darm me considerable, but there's lads here would treat you to a cowhide!"

Layton did not hear this alternative with all the conscious security of success, not to say that it was a penalty on failure far more severe and practical than any his fears had ever anticipated. Coldness he was prepared for, disapprobation he might endure, but he was not ready to be treated as a cheat and impostor because he had not satisfied the expectancies of an audience.

"I half regret," said he, "that I should not have learned something more of your public before making my appearance to them. It may not be, perhaps, too late."

"Well, I suspect it *is* too late," said the other, dryly. "They won't stand folks a-postin' up bills, and then sayin' 'There ain't no performance.' You're not in the Haymarket, sir, where you can come out with a flam about sudden indisposition, and a lie signed by a 'pottecary."

"But if I leave the town?"

"I wouldn't say you mightn't, if you had a bal-lōōn," said the other, laughing; "but as to any other way, I defy you!"

Layton was not altogether without the suspicion that Mr. Heron was trying to play upon his fears, and this was exactly the sort of outrage that a mind like his would least tolerate. It was, to be sure, a wild, out-of-the-world kind of place; the people were a rough, semi-civilized-looking set; public opinion in such a spot *might* take a rude form; what they deemed unequal to their expectations, they *might* construe as a fraud upon their pockets; and if so, and that their judgment should take the form he hinted at—— Still, he was reluctant to accept this version of the case, and stood deeply pondering what line to adopt.

"You don't like it, stranger; now that's a fact," said Heron, as he scanned his features. "You've been a-thinkin', 'Oh, any rubbish I like will be good enough for these bark

cutters. What should such fellows know, except about their corn crops and their saw-mills? *I* needn't trouble my head about what I talk to 'em.' But now, you see, it ain't so; you begin to perceive that Jonathan, with his sleeves rolled up for work, is a smart man, who keeps his brains oiled and his thoughts polished, like one of Platt's engines, and it won't do to ask him to make French rolls out of sawdust!"

Layton was still silent, partly employed in reviewing the difficulty of his position, but even more, perhaps, from chagrin at the tone of impertinence addressed to him.

"Yes, sir," said Heron, continuing an imaginary dialogue with himself—"yes, sir; that's a mistake more than one of your countrymen has fallen into. As Mr. Clay said, it's so hard for an Englishman not to think of us as colonists."

"I've made up my mind," said Layton, at last. "I'll not lecture."

"Won't you? Then all I can say is, Britisher, look out for a busy arternoon. I told you what our people was. I warned you that if they struck work an hour earlier to listen to a preacher, it would fare ill with him if he wanted the mill to turn without water."

"I repeat, I'll not lecture, come what may of it," said Layton, firmly.

"Well, it ain't so very hard to guess what *will* come of it," replied the other.

"This is all nonsense and folly, sir," said Layton, angrily. "I have taken no man's money; I have deceived no one. Your people, when I shall have left this place, will be no worse than when I entered it."

"If that's your platform, stranger, come out and defend it; we'll have a meetin' called, and I promise you a fair hearin'."

"I have no account to render to any. I am not responsible for my conduct to one of you!" said Layton, angrily.

"You're a-beggin' the whole question, stranger; so jest keep these arguments for the meetin'."

"Meeting! I will attend no meeting! Whatever be your local ways and habits, you have no right to impose them upon a stranger. I am not one of you; I will not be one of you."

"That's more of the same sort of reasonin'; but you'll be chastised, Britisher, see if you ain't!"

"Let me have some sort of conveyance, or, if need be, a horse. I will leave this at once. Any expenses I have incurred I am ready to pay. You hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you, but that ain't enough. You're bound by

them bills, as you'll see stickin' up all through the town, to appear this evening and deliver a lecture before the people of this city——"

"One word for all, I'll not do it."

"And do you tell me, sir, that when our folk is a-gatherin' about the assembly rooms, that they're to be told to go home agin; that the Britisher has changed his mind, and feels someways as if he didn't like it?"

"That may be as it can; my determination is fixed. You may lecture yourself; or you can, perhaps, induce your friend—I forget his name—to favour the company."

"Well, sir, if old Poll's strength was equal to it, the public wouldn't have to regret *you*. It ain't one of *your* stamp could replace *him*, that I tell you."

A sudden thought here flashed across Layton's mind, and he hastened to profit by it.

"Why not ask him to take my place? I am ready, most ready, to requite his services. Tell him, if you like, that I will pay all the expenses of the evening, and leave him the receipts. Or say, if he prefer, that I will give him thirty, forty, ay, fifty dollars, if he will relieve me from an engagement I have no mind for."

"Well, that does sound a bit reasonable," said the other, slowly; "though, mayhap, he'll not think the terms so high. You wouldn't say eighty, or a hundred, would you? He's proud, old Poll, and it's best not to offend him by a mean offer."

Layton bit his lip impatiently, and walked up and down the room without speaking.

"Not to say," resumed Heron, "that he's jest out of a sick bed; the exertion might give him a relapse. The con-tingencies is to be calc'lated, as they say on the railroads."

"If it be only a question between fifty and eighty——"

"That's it—well spoken. Well, call it a hundred, and I'm off to see if it can't be done." And without waiting for a reply, Heron hastened out of the room as he spoke.

Notwithstanding the irritation the incident caused him, Layton could not, as soon as he found himself alone, avoid laughing at the absurdity of his situation.

If he never went the full length of believing in the hazardous consequences Mr. Heron predicted, he at least saw that he must be prepared for any mark of public disfavour his disappointment might excite; and it was just possible such censure might assume a very unpleasant shape. The edicts of Judge Lynch are not always in accordance with the

dignity of the accused, and though this consideration first forced him to laugh, his second thoughts were far graver. Nor were these thoughts unmixed with doubts as to what Quackinboss would say of the matter. Would he condemn the rashness of his first pledge, or the timidity of his retreat? or would he indignantly blame him for submission to a menace? In the midst of these considerations, Heron re-entered the room.

"There, sir; it's all signed and sealed. Old Poll's to do the work, and you're to be too ill to appear. That will require your stayin' here till nightfall; but when the folks is at the hall, you can slip through the town and make for New Lebanon."

"And I am to pay—how much did you say?"

"What you proposed yourself, sir. A hundred dollars."

"At eight o'clock, then, let me have a waggon ready," said Layton, too much irritated with his own conduct to be moved by anything in that of his host. He therefore paid little attention to Mr. Heron's account of all the ingenuity and address it had cost him to induce old Poll to become his substitute, nor would he listen to one word of the conversation reported to have passed on that memorable occasion. What cared he to hear how old Poll looked ten years younger since the bargain? He was to be dressed like a gentleman; he was to be in full black; he was to resume all the dignity of the station he had once held; while he gave the public what he had hitherto resolutely refused—some account of himself and his own life. Layton turned away impatiently at these details; they were all associated with too much that pained to interest or to please him.

"The matter is concluded now, and let me hear no more of it," said he, peevishly. "I start at eight." And with this he turned away, leaving no excuse to his host to remain, or resume an unpalatable subject.

"Your waggon shall be here at the hour, and a smart pair of horses to bowl you along, sir," said Heron, too well satisfied on the whole to be annoyed by a passing coldness.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE LECTURER.

Alfred Layton's day dragged drearily along, watching and waiting for the hour of departure. Close prisoner as he was, the time hung heavily on his hands, without a book or any sort of companionship to beguile its weariness. He tried various ways to pass the hours; he pondered over a faintly-coloured and scarce traceable map on the walls. It represented America, with all the great western annexations, in that condition of vague obscurity in which geographers were wont to depict the Arctic regions. He essayed to journalize his experiences on the road; but he lost patience in recording the little incidents which composed them. He endeavoured to take counsel with himself about his future; but he lost heart in the inquiry, as he bethought him how little direction he had ever given hitherto to his life, and how completely he had been the sport of accident.

He was vexed and angry with himself. It was the first time he had been called upon to act by his own guidance for months back, and he had made innumerable mistakes in the attempt. Had Quackinboss been with him, he well knew all these blunders had been avoided. This reflection pained him, just as it has pained many a gifted and accomplished man to think that life and the world are often more difficult than book-learning.

He was too much out of temper with the town to interest himself in what went on beneath his windows, and only longed for night, that he might leave it, never to return. At last the day began to wane, the shadows fell longer across the empty street, some cawing rooks swept over the tree-tops to their homes in the tall pines, and an occasional waggon rolled heavily by, with field implements in it—signs all that the hours of labour had drawn to a close. "I shall soon be off," muttered he; "soon hastening away from a spot whose memory will be a nightmare to me." In the grey half-light he sat, thinking the thought which has found its way into so many hearts. What meaning have these little episodes of loneliness? What are the lessons they are meant to teach?

Are they intended to attach us more closely to those we love, by showing how wearily life drags on in absence from them? or are they meant as seasons of repose, in which we may gain strength for fresh efforts?

Mr. Heron broke in upon these musings. He came to say that crowds were hurrying to the lecture-room, and in a few minutes more Layton might steal away, and, reaching the outskirts of the town, gain the waggon that was to convey him to Lebanon.

"You'll not forget this place, I reckon," said he, as he assisted Layton to close and fasten up his carpet-bag. "You'll be proud, one of these days, to say, 'I was there some five-and-twenty, or maybe thirty, years back. There was only one what you'd call a first-rate hotel in the town; it was kept by a certain Dan Heron, the man that made Bunkumville, who built Briggs-block and the Apollonicon. I knew him.' Yes, sir, I think I hear you sayin' it."

"I half suspect you are mistaken, my friend," said Layton, peevishly. "I live in the hope never to hear the name of this place again, as assuredly I am determined never to speak of it."

"Well, you Britishers can't help envy, that's a fact," said Heron, with a sigh that showed how deeply he felt this unhappy infirmity. "Take a glass of something to warm you, and let's be movin'. I'll see you safe through the town."

Layton thankfully accepted his guidance, and each taking a share of the luggage, they set forth into the street. Night was now fast falling, and they could move along without any danger of detection; but, besides this, there were few abroad, the unaccustomed attraction of the lecture-room having drawn nearly all in that direction. Little heeding the remarks by which Heron beguiled the way, Layton moved on, only occupied with the thought of how soon he would be miles away from this unloved spot, when his companion suddenly arrested his attention by grasping his arm, as he said, "There; did your hear that?"

"Hear what?" asked Layton, impatiently.

"The cheerin', the shoutin'! That's for old Poll. It's the joy of our folk to see the old boy once more about. It would be well for some of our public men if they were half as popular in their own states as he is with the people down here. There it is again!"

Layton was not exactly in the fit humour to sympathize with this success, and neither the lecturer nor his audience

engaged any large share of his goodwill; he, therefore, merely muttered an impatient wish to get along, while he quickened his own pace in example.

"Well, I never heerd greater applause than that. They're at it again!"

A wild burst of uproarious enthusiasm at the same moment burst forth and filled the air.

"There ain't no mockery there, stranger," said Heron; "that ain't like the cheer the slaves in the Old World greet their kings with, while the police stands by to make a note of the men as hasn't yelled loud enough." This taunt was wrung from him by the insufferable apathy of Layton's manner; but even the bitterness of the sneer failed to excite retort.

"Is this our shortest road?" was all the reply he made.

"No; this will save us something," said Heron, with the quickness of one inspired by a sudden thought; and at the same instant he turned into a narrow street on his left.

They walked briskly along for a few minutes without speaking, when, suddenly turning the angle of the way, they found themselves directly in front of the assembly-room, from whose three great doors the light streamed boldly out across the great square before it. The place seemed densely thronged, and even on the pillars outside persons were grouped, anxious at this cheap expedient to participate in the pleasure of the lecture. By this time all was hushed and quiet, and it was evident by the rapt attention of the audience that all were eagerly bent on listening to the words of the speaker.

"Why have we come this way?" asked Layton, peevishly.

"Jest that you might see that sight yonder, sir," said Heron, calmly; "that you might carry away with you the recollection of a set of hard-worked, horny-handed men, labourin' like Turks for a livin', and yet ready and willin' to give out of their hard earnin's to listen to one able to instruct or improve 'em. That's why you come this way, stranger. Ain't the reason a good one?"

Layton did not reply, but stood watching with deep interest the scene of silent, rapt attention in the crowded room, from which now not the slightest sound proceeded. Drawn by an attraction he could not explain, he slowly mounted the steps and gained a place near the door, but from which he was unable to catch sight of the lecturer. He was speaking; but, partly from the distance, and in part from the low tones of his voice, Layton could not hear his words. Eager to

learn by what sort of appeal an audience like this could be addressed—curious to mark the tone by which success was achieved—he pushed vigorously onward till he reached one of the columns that supported the roof of the hall, and which, acting as a conductor, conveyed every syllable to his ears. The lecturer's voice, artificially raised to reach the limits of the room, was yet full, strong, and sonorous, and it was managed with all the skill of a practised speaker. He had opened his address by mentioning the circumstances which had then brought him before them. He explained that but from an adverse incident—a passing indisposition—they were on that night to have heard one of those accomplished speakers who had won fame and honour in the old country. There was a reserve and delicacy in the mention of the circumstances by which he became the substitute for this person that struck Layton forcibly; he was neither prepared for the sentiment nor the style of the orator; but, besides, there was in the utterance of certain words, and in an occasional cadence, something that made his heart beat quicker, and sent a strange thrill through him.

The explanation over, there was a pause—a pause of silence so perfect, that as the speaker laid down the glass of water he had been drinking, the sound was heard throughout the room. He now began, his voice low, his words measured, his manner subdued. Layton could not follow him throughout, but only catch enough to perceive that he was giving a short sketch of the relative conditions of England and Ireland antecedent to the Union. He pictured the one, great, rich, powerful, and intolerant, with all the conscious pride of its own strength, and the immeasurable contempt for whatever differed from it; the other, bold, daring, and defiant, not at all aware of its inability to cope with its more powerful neighbour in mere force, but reposing an unbounded trust in its superior quickness, its readiness of resource, its fertility of invention. He dwelt considerably on those Celtic traits by which he claimed for Irishmen a superiority in all those casualties of life which demand promptitude and ready-wittedness.

"The gentleman who was to have occupied this chair to-night," said he, raising his voice, so as to be heard throughout the room, "would, I doubt not, have given you a very different portrait, and delivered a very different judgment. You would at this moment have been listening to a description of that great old country we are all so proud of, endeavouring, with all the wise prudence of a careful mother, to

train up a wayward and capricious child in the paths of virtue and obedience. But you will bear more patiently with me; you will lend me a more favourable hearing, and a kindlier sympathy, for America, too, was a runaway daughter, and though it was only a Gretna Green match you first made with Freedom, you have lived to see the marriage solemnized in all form, and acknowledged by the whole world."

When the cheer which greeted these words had subsided, he went on to glance at what might possibly have been the theme of the other lecturer: "I am told," said he—"for I never saw him—that he was a young, a very young man. But to speak of the scenes to which I am coming, it is not enough to have read, studied, and reflected. A man should have done more; he ought to have seen, heard, and acted. These confessions are bought dearly, for it is at the price of old age I can make them; but is it not worth old age to have heard Burke in all the majestic grandeur of his great powers—to have listened to the scathing whirlwind of Grattan's passion—to have sat beneath the gallery when Flood denounced him, and that terrible duel of intellect took place, far more moving than the pistol encounter that followed it? Ay, I knew them all! I have jested with Parsons, laughed with Toler, laughed and wept both with poor Curran. You may find it difficult to believe that he who now addresses you should ever have moved in the class to which such men pertained. You here, whose course of life, sustained by untiring toil, and animated by a spirit of resolute courage, moves ever upward, who are better to-day than yesterday, and will to-morrow be farther on the road than to-day, who labour the soil of which your grandchildren will be the proud possessors, may have some difficulty in tracing a career of continued descent, and will be slow to imagine how a man could fall from a station of respectability and regard, and be—such as I am!"

Just as the speaker had uttered these words, a cry, so wild and piercing as to thrill through every heart, resounded through the building; the great mass of men seemed to heave and swell like the sea in a storm. It was one of those marvellous moments in which human emotions seem whispered from breast to breast, and men are moved by a strange flood of sympathy; and now the crowd opened, like a cleft wave, to give passage to a young man, who with a strength that seemed supernatural forced his way to the front. There was that in his wild, excited look that almost bespoke insanity, while he struggled to effect his passage.

Astonished by the scene of commotion in front of him, and unable to divine its cause, the lecturer haughtily asked, "Who comes here to disturb the order of this meeting?" The answer was quickly rendered, as springing over the rail that fenced the stage, Alfred cried out, "My father! my father!" and throwing his arms around him, pressed him to his heart. As for the old man, he stood stunned and speechless for a moment, and then burst into tears.

CHAPTER XLV.

OF BYGONES.

Were we at the outset instead of the close of our journey, we could not help dwelling on the scene the lecture-room presented as the discovery became whispered throughout the crowd. Our goal is, however, now almost in sight, and we must not tarry. We will but record one thought, as we say that they who were accustomed to associate the idea of fine sympathies with fine clothes and elegance of manner, would have been astonished at the instinctive delicacy and good breeding of that dense mass of men. Many were disappointed at the abrupt conclusion of a great enjoyment, nearly all were moved by intense curiosity to know the history of those so strangely brought together again, and yet not one murmured a complaint, not one obtruded a question; but with a few words of kindly greeting, a good wish, or a blessing, they stole quietly away and left the spot.

Seated side by side in a room of the inn, old Layton and his son remained till nigh daybreak. How much had they to ask and answer of each other. Amidst the flood of questions poured forth, anything like narrative made but sorry progress; but at length Alfred came to hear how his father had been duped by a pretended friend, cheated out of his discovery, robbed of his hard-won success, and then denounced as an impostor.

"This made me violent, and then they called me mad. A

little more of such persecution and their words might have come true.

"I scarcely yet know to what I am indebted for my liberation. I was a patient in Swift's Hospital, when one day came the Viceroy to visit it, and with him came a man I had met before in society, but not over amicably, nor with such memories as could gratify. 'Who is this?' cried he, as he saw me at work in the garden. 'I think I remember his face.' The keeper whispered something, and he replied, 'Ah! indeed!' while he drew near where I was digging. 'What do you grow here?' asked he of me, in a half-careless tone. 'Madder,' shouted I, with a yell that made him start; and then, recovering himself, he hastened off to report the answer to the Viceroy.

"They both came soon after to where I was. The Viceroy, with that incaution which makes some people talk before the insane as though they were deaf, said, in my hearing, 'And so you tell me he was once a Fellow of Trinity?' 'Yes, my Lord,' said I, assuming the reply, 'a Regius Professor and a Medallist, now a Madman and a Pauper. The converse is the gentleman at your side. *He* began as a fool, and has ended as a Poor Law Commissioner!' They both turned away, but I cried out, 'Mr. Ogden, one word with you before you go.' He came back. 'I have been placed here,' said I, 'at the instance of a man who has robbed me. I am not mad, but I am friendless. The name of my persecutor is Holmes. He writes himself Captain Nicholas Holmes——'

"He would not hear another word, but hurried away without answering me. I know no more than that I was released ten days after—that I was turned out in the streets to starve or rob. My first thought was to find out this man Holmes. To meet and charge him with his conduct towards me, in some public place, would have been a high vengeance; but I sought him for weeks in vain, and at last learned he had gone abroad.

"How I lived all that time I cannot tell you; it is all to me now like a long and terrible dream. I was constantly in the hands of the police, and rarely a day passed that I had not some angry altercation with the authorities. I was in one of these one morning, when, half-stupefied with cold and want, I refused to answer further. The magistrate asked, 'Has he any friends? Is there no one who takes any interest in him?' The constable answered, 'None, your worship; and it is all the better, he would only heap disgrace on them!'

"It was then, for the first moment of my life, the full

measure of all I had become stood plainly before me. In those few words lay the sentence passed upon my character. From that hour forth I determined never to utter my name again. I kept this pledge faithfully, nor was it difficult; few questioned, none cared for me. I lived—if that be the word for it—in various ways. I compounded drugs for chemists, corrected the press for printers, hawked tracts, made auction catalogues, and at last turned pyrotechnist to a kind of Vauxhall, all the while writing letters home with small remittances to your mother, who had died when I was in the madhouse. In a brief interval of leisure I went down to the north, to learn what I might of her last moments, and to see where they had laid her. There was a clergymen there who had been kind and hospitable towards me in better days, and it was to his house I repaired."

He paused, and for some minutes was silent. At length he said,—

"It is strange, but there are certain passages in my life, not very remarkable in themselves, that remain distinct and marked out, just as one sees certain portions of landscape by the glare of lightning flashes in a thunderstorm, and never forgets them after. Such was my meeting with this Mr. Millar. He was distributing bread to the poor, with the assistance of his clerk, on the morning that I came to his door. The act, charitable and good in itself, he endeavoured to render more profitable by some timely words of caution and advice; he counselled gratitude towards those who bestowed these bounties, and thrift in their use. Like all men who have never known want themselves, he denied that it ever came save through improvidence. He seemed to like the theme, and dwelt on it with pleasure, the more as the poor sycophants who received his alms eagerly echoed back concurrence in all that he spoke disparagingly of themselves. I waited eagerly till he came to a pause, and then I spoke.

"'Now,' said I, 'let us reverse this medal, and read it on the other side. Though as poor and wretched as any of those about, I have not partaken of your bounty, and I have the right to tell you that your words are untrue, your teaching unsound, and your theory a falsehood. To men like us, houseless, homeless, and friendless, you may as well preach good breeding and decorous manners, as talk of providence and thrift. Want is a disease; it attacks the poor, whose constitutions are exposed to it, and to lecture us against its inroads is like cautioning us against cold, by saying 'Take care to wear strong boots—mind that you take your great-

coat—be sure that you do not expose yourself to the night air.' You would be shocked, would you not, to address such sarcastic counsels to such poor, barefoot, ragged creatures as we are? And yet you are not shocked by enjoining things fifty times more absurd, five hundred times more difficult. Thrift is the inhabitant of warm homesteads, where the abundant meal is spread upon the board and the fire blazes on the hearth. It never lives in the hovel, where the snow-drift lodges in the chimney, and the rain beats upon the bed of straw!'

"'Who is this fellow?' cried the Rector, outraged at being thus replied to. 'Where did he come from?'

"'From a life of struggle and hardship,' said I, 'that if *you* had been exposed to and confronted with, you had died of starvation, despite all your wise saws on thrift and providence.'

"Gracious mercy!' muttered he, 'can this be——?' and then he stopped; and beckoning me to follow him into an inner room, he retired.

"'Do I speak to Dr. Layton?' asked he, curtly, when we were alone.

"'I was that man,' said I. 'I am nothing now.'

"'By what unhappy causes have you come to this?'

"'The lack of that same thrift you were so eloquent about, perhaps. I was one of those who could write, speak, invent, and discover; but I was never admitted a brother of the guild of those who save. The world, however, has always its compensations, and I met thrifty men. Some of them stole my writings, and some filched my discoveries. They have prospered, and live to illustrate your pleasant theory; but I have not come here to make my confessions. I would learn of you certain things about what was once my home.'

"He was most kind—he would have been more than kind to me had I let him; but I would accept of nothing. I did not even break bread under his roof, though I had fasted for a day and a half. He had a few objects left with him to give me, which I took—the old pocket-book one of them—and then I went away."

The old man's narrative was henceforth one long series of struggles with fortune. He concealed none of those faults by which he had so often wrecked his better life. Hating and despising the companionship to which his reduced condition had brought him, he professed to believe there was less degradation in drunkenness than in such association. Through all he said, in fact, there was the old defiant spirit

of early days, a scornful rejection of all assistance, and even, in failure and misery, a self-reliance that seemed invincible. He had come to America by the invitation of a theatrical manager, who had failed, leaving him in the direst necessity and want.

The dawn of day found him still telling of his wayward life, its sorrows, its struggles, and defeats.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE DOCTOR'S NARRATIVE

Old Layton never questioned his son whither they were going, or for what, till the third day of their journeying together. Such, indeed, was the preoccupation of his mind, that he travelled along unmindful of new places and new people, all his thoughts deeply engaged by one single theme. Brief as this interval was, what a change had it worked in his appearance! Instead of the wild and haggard look his features used to wear, their expression was calm, somewhat stern, perhaps, and such as might have reminded one who had seen him in youth of the Herbert Layton of his college days. He had grown more silent, too, and there was in his manner the same trait of haughty reserve which once distinguished him. His habits of intemperance were abandoned at once, and without the slightest reference to motive or intention he gave his son to see that he had entered on a new course in life.

"Have you told me where we are going, Alfred, and have I forgotten it?" said he, on the third day of the journey.

"No, father; so many other things occurred to us to talk over that I never thought of this. It is time, however, I should tell you. We are going to meet one who would rather make your acquaintance than be the guest of a king."

The old man smiled with a sort of cold incredulity, and his son went on to recount how, in collecting the stray papers and journals of the "Doctor," as they styled him between them, this stranger had come to conceive the greatest admira-

tion for his bold energy of temperament and the superior range of his intellect. The egotism, so long dormant in that degraded nature, revived and warmed up as the youth spoke, and he listened with proud delight at the story of all the American's devotion to him.

"He is a man of science, then, Alfred?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"He is, at least, one of those quick-minded fellows who in this stirring country adapt to their purpose discoveries they have had no share in making; is he not?"

"Scarcely even that. He is a man of ordinary faculties, many prejudices, but of a manly honesty of heart I have never seen surpassed."

"Then he is poor," said the old man, sarcastically.

"I know little of his circumstances, but I believe they are ample."

"Take my word for it, boy, they are not," said the other with a bitter smile. "Fortune is a thrifty goddess, and where she bestows a generous nature she takes care it shall have nothing to give away."

"I trust your precept will not apply to this case, at all events. I have been his pensioner for nigh a year back: I am so still. I had hoped, indeed, by this project of lecturing——"

"Nay, nay, boy, no success could come of that. Had you been a great name in your own country, and come here heralded by honours won already, they would have given you a fair hearing and a generous recompense, but they will not take as money the unstamped metal; they will not stoop to accept what the old country sends forth without acknowledgment, as good enough for *them*. Believe me, this race is prouder than our own, and it is not by unworthy sneers at them that we shall make them less vainglorious."

"I scarcely know them, but for the sake of that one man I owe them a deep affection," said Alfred, warmly.

"I have a scheme for you," said the old man, after a pause; "but we will talk of it later on. For the present, I want you to aid me in a plan of my own. Ever since I have been in this country I have endeavoured to find out a person whose name alone was known to me, and with whom I gave a solemn promise to communicate—a death-bed promise it was, and given under no common circumstances. The facts were these:—

"I was once upon a time, when practising as a physician at Jersey, sent for to attend a patient taken suddenly and danger-

ously ill. The case was a most embarrassing one. There were symptoms so incongruous as to reject the notion of any ordinary disease, and such as might well suggest the suspicion of poisoning, and yet so skilfully and even patiently had the scheme been matured, the detection of the poison during life was very difficult. My eagerness in the inquiry was mistaken by the patient for a feeling of personal kindness towards himself—an error very familiar to all medical men in practice. He saw in my unremitting attention and hourly watching by his bedside the devotion of one like an old friend, and not the scientific ardour of a student.

"It is just possible that his gratitude was the greater, that the man was one little likely to conciliate good feeling or draw any sympathy towards him. He was a hard, cold, selfish fellow, whose life had been passed amongst the worst classes of play-men, and who rejected utterly all thought of truth or confidence in his old associates. I mention this to show how, in a very few days, the accident of my situation established between us a freedom and a frankness that savoured of long acquaintance.

"In his conversations with me he confessed that his wife had been divorced from a former husband, and, from circumstances known to him, he believed she desired his death. He told me of the men to whom in particular his suspicions attached, and the reasons of the suspicions; that these men would be irretrievably ruined if his speculations on the turf were to succeed, and that there was not one of them would not peril his life to get sight of his book on the coming Derby. I was curious to ascertain why he should have surrounded himself with men so obviously his enemies, and he owned it was an act prompted by a sort of dogged courage, to show them that he did not fear them. Nor was this the only motive, as he let out by an inadvertence: he cherished the hope of detecting an intrigue between one of his guests and his wife, as the means of liberating himself from a tie long distasteful to him.

"One of the party had associated himself with him in this project, and promised him all his assistance. Here was a web of guilt and treachery, entangled enough to engage a deep interest! For the man himself, I cared nothing; there was in his nature that element of low selfishness that is fatal to all sense of sympathy. His thoughts and speculations ranged only over suspicions and distrusts, and the only hopes he ever expressed were for the punishment of his enemies. Scarcely, indeed, did a visit pass in which he did not compel

me to repeat a solemn oath that the mode of his death should be explored, and his poisoners—if there were such—be brought to trial. As he drew nigh his last his sufferings gave little intervals of rest, and his mind occasionally wandered. Even in his ravings, however, revenge never left him, and he would break out into wild rhapsodies in imitation of the details of justice, calling on the prisoners, and by name, to say whether they would plead guilty or not? asking them to stand forward, and then reciting with hurried impetuosity the terms of an indictment for murder. To these there would succeed a brief space of calm reason, in which he told me that his daughter—a child by a former wife—was amply provided for, and that her fortune was so far out of the reach of his enemies that it lay in America, where her uncle, her guardian, resided. He gave me his name and address, and in my pocket-book—this old and much-used pocket-book that you see—he wrote a few tremulous lines, accrediting me to this gentleman as the one sole friend beside him in his last struggles. As he closed the book, he said, 'As you hope to die in peace, swear to me not to neglect this, nor leave my poor child a beggar.' And I swore it.

"His death took place that night; the inquest followed on the day after. My suspicions were correct; he had died of corrosive sublimate; the quantity would have killed a dozen men. There was a trial and a conviction. One of them I know was executed, and, if I remember aright, sentence of transportation passed on another. The woman, however, was not implicated, and her reputed lover escaped. My evidence was so conclusive, and so fatal, that the prisoners' counsel had no other resource than to damage my credit by assailing my character, and in his cross-examination of me he drew forth such details of my former life, and the vicissitudes of my existence, that I left the witness-table a ruined man. It was not a very difficult task to represent a life of poverty as one of ignominy and shame. The next day my acquaintances passed without recognizing me, and from that hour forth none ever consulted me. In my indignation at this injustice I connected all who could have in any way contributed to my misfortune, and this poor orphan child amongst the rest. Had I never been engaged in that ill-starred case my prospects in life had been reasonably fair and hopeful. I was in sufficient practice, increasing in repute, and likely to succeed, when this calamitous affair crossed me.

"Patience under unmerited suffering was never amongst my virtues, and in various ways I assailed those who had

attacked me. I ridiculed the lawyer who had conducted the defence, sneered at his law, exposed his ignorance of chemistry, and, carried away by that fatal ardour of acrimony I never knew how to restrain, I more than suggested that, when he appealed to Heaven in the assertion of his client's innocence, he held in his possession a written confession of his guilt. For this an action of libel was brought against me; the damages were assessed at five hundred pounds, and I spent four years in a gaol to acquit the debt. Judge, then, with what memories I ever referred to that event of my life. It was, perhaps, the one solitary incident in which I had resisted a strong temptation. I was offered a large bribe to fail in my analysis, and yet it cost me all the prosperity it had taken years of labour to accomplish!

"Imprisonment had not cooled my passion: the first thing which I did when free was to dramatize the trial for one of those low pot-houses where Judge and Jury scenes are represented, and so accurately did I caricature my enemy, the counsel, that he was actually laughed out of court and ruined. If I could have traced the other actors in the terrible incident, I would have pursued them with like rancour; but I could not; they had left England, and gone, Heaven knows where or how! As to the orphan girl, whose interest I had sworn to watch over, any care for her now would only have insulted my own misery; my rage was blind and undiscriminating, and I would not be guided by reason. It was, therefore, in a spirit of unreflecting vengeance that I never took any steps regarding her, but preserved, even to this hour, a letter to her guardian—it is there, in that pocket-book—which might perhaps have vindicated her right to wealth and fortune. 'No,' thought I, 'they have been *my* ruin; I will not be the benefactor of one of them!'

"I kept my word; and even when my own personal distresses were greatest, I would not have raised myself out of want at the price of relinquishing that revenge. I have lived to think and feel more wisely," said he, after a pause—"I have lived to learn the great lesson that every mishap of my life was of my own procuring, and that self-indulgence and a vindictive spirit are enough to counterbalance tenfold more than all the abilities I ever possessed. The world will no more confide its interests to men like me than they will take a tiger for a house-dog. I want to make some reparation for this wrong, Alfred. I want to seek out this person I have spoken of, and, if this girl still live, to place her in possession of her own. You will help me in this, will you not?"

It was not without a burning impatience that young Layton had listened to his father's narrative; he was eager to tell him that his friend the Colonel had already addressed himself to the enterprise, all his interests being engaged by the journals and letters he had collected when in Ireland. Alfred now, in a few hurried words, related all this, and told how, at that very hour, Quackinboss was eagerly prosecuting the inquiry. "He has gone down to Norfolk in search of this Winthrop," said he.

"He will not find him there," said old Layton. "He left Norfolk, for the Far West, two years back. He settled at Chicago, but he has not remained there. So much I have learned, and it is all that is known about him."

"Let us go to Chicago, then," said Alfred.

"It is what I would advise. He is a man of sufficient note and mark to be easily traced. It is a well-known name, and belongs to a family much looked up to. These are my credentials, if I should ever chance to come up with him." As he spoke, he unclasped a very old and much-worn leather pocket-book, searching through whose pages he at last found what he sought for. It was a leaf, scrawled over in a trembling manner, and ran thus: "Consult the bearer of this, Dr. Layton, about Clara; he is my only friend at this dreadful hour, and he is to be trusted in all things. Watch well that they who have murdered *me* do not rob *her*. He will tell you——" It concluded thus abruptly, but was signed firmly, "Godfrey Hawke, Nest, Jersey," with the date; and underneath, "To Harvey Winthrop, Norfolk, U.S."

"This would be a meagre letter of credit, Alfred, to most men; but I have heard much of this same Winthrop; all represent him as a fine-hearted, generous fellow, who has done already much to trace out his niece, and restore to her what she owns. If we succeeded in discovering him, I mean to offer my services to search out the girl. I saw, a short time before I left England, one of the men who were implicated in the murder. I knew him at once. The threat of reviving the old story of shame will soon place him in my power, if I can but find him; and through *him* I am confident we shall trace *her*."

To understand the ardour with which the old man entered upon this inquiry, one must have known the natures of those men to whom the interest of such a search has all the captivation of a game. It was, to his thinking, like some case of subtle analysis, in which the existence of a certain ingredient was to be tested; it was a problem, requiring all his acute-

ness to solve, and he addressed himself to the task with energy and zeal. The young man was not slow to associate himself in the enterprise, and, in his desire for success, there mingled generous thoughts and more kindly sympathies, which assuredly did not detract from the interest of the pursuit.

The theme engrossed all their thoughts; they discussed it in every fashion, speculated on it in every shape, pictured to themselves almost every incident and every stage of the inquiry, imagining the various obstacles that might arise, and planning how to overcome them. Thus journeying they arrived at Chicago, but only to learn that Winthrop had left that city, and was now established farther to the westward, at a place called Gallina. Without halting or delay they started for Gallina. The road was a new and a bad one, the horses indifferent, and the stages unusually long. It was on the fourth evening of the journey that they arrived at a small log-house on the skirt of a pine wood, at which they were given to expect fresh horses. They were disappointed, however, for the horses had already been sent to bring up two travellers from Gallina, and who had taken the precaution of securing a rapid transit.

"We are here, then, for the night," said old Layton, with a faint sigh, as he endeavoured to resign himself to the delay.

"Here they come!" said the host of the log-hut, as the rattle of a heavy waggon was heard from the dense wood. "Our sheriff don't let the moss grow under his feet. Listen to the pace he's coming."

Seated with his son beside him on the wooden bench before the door, the old man watched the arrival of the newcomers. The first to descend from the waggon was a man somewhat advanced in life, but hale and stout, with a well-bronzed face, and every semblance of a vigorous health. He saluted the host cordially, and was received with a sort of deference only accorded to men of official station. He was followed by a younger man, but who displayed as he moved evident signs of being fatigued by the journey.

"Come, Seth," said the elder, "let us see what you have got for our supper, for we must be a-moving briskly."

"Well, sheriff, there ain't much," said the host; "and what there is you'll have to share with the two gentlemen yonder; they've just come East, and are waitin' for you to get a morsel to eat."

"Always glad to chance on good company," said the sheriff, saluting the strangers as he spoke; and while they

were interchanging their greetings, the host laid the table, and made preparation for the meal. "I must look after my fellow-traveller," said the sheriff, "he seems so tired and jaded. I half fear he will be unable to go on to-night."

He speedily returned with good tidings of his friend, and soon afterwards the party took their places at the supper-table.

The sheriff, like his countrymen generally, was frank and outspoken; he talked freely of the new-settled country, its advantages and its difficulties, and at last, as the night closed in, he made another visit to his friend.

"All right, Seth," said he, as he came back; "we shall be able to push on. Let them 'hitch' the nags as soon as may be, for we've a long journey before us."

"You're for the Lakes, I reckon?" said Seth, inquiringly

"Farther than that."

"Up to Saratoga and the Springs, maybe?"

"Farther still."

"Well, you ain't a-goin' to New York at this time of year, sheriff?"

"That am I, and farther still, Seth; I am going to the old country, where I haven't been for more than thirty years, and where I never thought to go again."

"You might visit worse lands, sir," said old Layton, half resentfully.

"You mistook my meaning, stranger," said the other, "if you thought my words reflected on England. There is only one land I love better."

The honest speech reconciled them at once, and with a hearty shake-hands and a kindly-wished good journey, they separated.

"Did you remark that man who accompanied the sheriff?" said Layton to his son, as they stood at the door watching the waggon while it drove away.

"Not particularly," said Alfred.

"Well, I did my best to catch sight of him, but I could not. It struck me that he was less an invalid than one who wanted to escape observation; he wore his hat slouched over his eyes, and covered his mouth with his hand when he spoke."

The young man only smiled at what he deemed a mere caprice of suspicion, and the subject dropped between them. After a while, however, the father said,—

"What our host has just told me strengthens my impression. The supposed sick man ate a hearty supper, and drank two glasses of stiff brandy-and-water."

"And if he did, can it concern us, father?" said Alfred, smiling.

"Yes, boy, if we were the cause of the sudden indisposition. He was tired, perhaps, when he arrived, but I saw no signs of more than fatigue in his movements, and I observed that, at the first glance towards us, he hurried into the inner room and never reappeared till he left. I'm not by any means certain that the fellow had not his reasons for avoiding us."

Rather treating this as the fancy of one whose mind had been long the prey of harassing distrusts than as founded on calmer reason, Alfred made no answer, and they separated for the night without recurring to the subject.

It was late on the following day they reached Gallina. The first question was, if Harvey Winthrop lived there? "Yes; he is our sheriff," was the answer. They both started, and exchanged looks of strange meaning.

"And he left this yesterday?" asked old Layton.

"Yes, sir. An Englishman came two days back with some startling news for him—some say of a great fortune left him somewhere—and he's off to England to make out his claim."

Old Layton and his son stood speechless and disconcerted. These were the two travellers who had passed them at the log-hut, and thus had they spent some hours, without knowing it, in the company of him they had been travelling hundreds of miles to discover.

"And his friend knew us, and avoided us, Alfred," said old Layton. "Mark that fact, boy, and observe that, where there is ground for fear in one heart, there is reason for hope in some other. We must follow them at once."

CHAPTER XLVII.

A HAPPY ACCIDENT.

Having written a hurried letter to Quackinboss acquainting him with the causes which should prevent him from keeping his rendezvous at St. Louis, and informing him how he had met with his father, he briefly mentioned that they were about to return to New York with all speed, in the hope of coming up with Winthrop before he sailed for England. "Come what may," he added, "we shall await you there. We long to meet you, and add your counsels to our own." This letter he addressed to St. Louis, and posted at once.

It was ten days after this they reached New York. Their journey had been delayed by a series of accidents—a railroad smash at Detroit amongst the number; and when they arrived at the capital, it was to learn that the *Asia* had sailed that very morning for Liverpool, and at the agent's office they found that Mr. Harvey Winthrop was a passenger, and with him a certain Mr. Jacob Trover.

"Trover!" repeated Alfred, "he came out in the same ship with us, and it was in his company Quackinboss went down to the South, fully convinced that the man was the agent in some secret transaction."

As he stood looking at the name on the agent's list with that unreasoning steadfastness that in a difficulty often attaches us to the incident which has first awakened us to a sense of embarrassment, he heard a well-remembered voice behind him exclaim, "What! sailed this mornin'? well, darn me considerable, if that ain't takin' the ropes of us!" He turned, and it was Quackinboss. After the heartiest of greetings on both sides, Alfred presented his father to his friend.

"Well, sir," said the Colonel, impressively, "there ain't that man livin' I want to shake the hand of as I do yours. I know you, sir, better, mayhap, than that youth beside you. I have studied your character in your writin's, and I'm here to say there ain't your superior, if there be your equal, in your country or mine."

"This opinion will make our intimacy very difficult," said

the old man, smiling. "I can scarcely hope to keep up the delusion, even for twenty-four hours."

"Yes, sir, you can," replied the Colonel; "jest talk the way you write."

"You have seen this, I suppose?" said Alfred, pointing to the list of the lately departed passengers, and desirous of engaging his friend in another theme.

"Yes, and gone with Winthrop, too," said the Colonel. "You wouldn't believe how he doubled on me, that man Trover. I thought I had him, too. We were a-travellin' together as thick as thieves, a-tellin' each other all our bygones in life and our plans for the future, and, at last, as good as agreed we'd go partners in a mill that was for sale, about three miles from Carthage. But he wanted to see the water-power himself, and so we left the high road, and set out to visit it. At our arrival, as we was gettin' out of the waggon, he sprained his ankle, and had to be helped into the house.

"'I am afraid,' said he, 'there's more mischief than a sprain here; have you any skill as a surgeon?'

"'Well,' said I, 'I ain't so bad about a fracture or dislocashin, and, what's better, I've got a note-book with me full of all manner of receipts for washes and the like.' It was your journal, Doctor Layton, that I spoke of. It was, as you may remember, filled with hints about useful herbs and odd roots, and so on, and there was all about that case of a man called Hawke as was poisoned at Jersey—a wonderful trial that had a great hold upon me, as your son will tell you another time—but I didn't think of *that* at the moment; but turnin' to the part about sprains, I began to read him what you said: '"You must generally leech at first," says he,' I began; '"particularly where there is great pain with swellin'."'

"'Ah! I thought so,' sighed he; 'only how are we to get leeches in a place like this, and who is to apply them?'

"'I'll engage to do both within half an hour,' said I; and I put on my hat and set out.

"Now, I warn't sorry, you see, for the accident. I thought to myself, 'Here's a crittur goin' to be laid up ten days or a fortnight; I'll have all the care o' him, and it's strange if he won't let out some of his secrets between whiles. I'm curious to know what's a-brought him out here; he's not travellin' like one afraid of being pursued; he goes about openly and fearlessly, but he's always on the sharp, like a fellow that had somethin' on his mind, if one could only

come at it. If there's anythin' one can be sure of, it is that a man with a heavy conscience will try to relieve himself of the load; he's like a fellow always changin' the ballast of his boat to make her sail lighter, or a crittur that will be a-movin' his saddle, now on the withers, now on the croup, but it won't do, never a bit, when there's a sore back underneath. It was reflectin' over these things I fell into a sort of dreamy way, and didn't remember about the leeches for some time. At last I got 'em, and hastened back to the inn.

"'There's a note for you, sir, at the bar,' said the landlord. I took it, and read:—

"'Dear Colonel,—Thinking a little fresh air might serve me, I have gone out for a short drive.—Yours, till we meet again, "'J. T.'

"Yes, sir, he was off; and worse, too, had carried away with him that great book with all the writin' in, and that account of Hawke's poisonin'. I started in pursuit as quick as they could get me a waggon hitched, but I suppose I took the wrong road. I went to Utica, and then turned north as far as Albany, but I lost him. Better, perhaps, that I did so; I was riled considerable, and I ain't sure that I mightn't have done somethin' to be sorry for. Ain't it wonderful how ill one takes anythin' that reflects on one's skill and craftiness? just as if such qualities were great ones; I believe in my heart we are readier to resent what insults our supposed cleverness than what is an outrage on our honesty. Be that as it may, I never came up with him after, nor heard of him, till I read his name in that sheet."

"His theft of that book, connected with his companionship with Winthrop, suggests strongly the thought that his business here is the same as our own," said the Doctor.

"That's the way I reasoned it, too," said the Colonel.

"It is not impossible, besides, that he had some suspicion of your own object in this journey. Did the name of Winthrop ever come up in conversation between you?"

"Yes. I was once describin' my brother's location down in Ohio—I did it a purpose to see if he would show any signs of interest about Peddar's Clearin's and Holt's Acre—and then I mentioned, as if by chance, one Harvey Winthrop.

"'Oh, there was a man of that name in Liverpool once,' said he, 'but he died about two years gone.'

"'Did he?' said I, lookin' him hard.

"'Yes' said he—'of a quinsy.'

"It was as good as a play the way we looked at each other arter this. It was jest a game of chess, and I said, 'Move,' and he said, 'It ain't me to move—it's *your* turn.' And there we was."

"The fellow was shrewd, then?"

"Yes, sir, arter his fashion."

"We must follow him, that's certain. They will reach Liverpool by the 10th or 12th. When can we sail from this?"

"There's a packet sails on Wednesday next; that's the earliest."

"That must do, then. Let them be active as they may, they will scarcely have had time for much before we are up with them."

"It's as good as a squirrel hunt," said Quackinboss. "I'm darned if it don't set one's blood a-bilin' out of sheer excitement. What do you reckon this chap's arter?"

"He has perhaps found out this girl, and got her to make over her claim to this property; or she may have died, and he has put forward some one to personate her; or it is not improbable he may have arranged some marriage with himself, or one of his friends, for her."

"Then it ain't anythin' about the murder?" asked the Colonel, half disappointedly.

"Nothing whatever; that case was disposed of years ago. Whatever guilt may attach to those who escaped, the law cannot recognize now. They were acquitted, and they are innocent."

"That may be good law, sir, but it's strange justice. If I owed you a thousand dollars, and was too poor to pay it, I'm thinkin' you'd have it out of me some fine day when I grew rich enough to discharge the debt."

Layton shook his head in dissent at the supposed parallel.

"Ain't we always a-talkin' about the fallibility of our reason and the imperfection of our judgments? And what business have we, then, to say, 'There, come what will tomorrow of evidence or proof, my mind is made up, and I'm determined to know nothin' more than I know now?'"

"What say you to the other side of the question—that of the man against whom nothing is proven, but who, out of the mere obscurity that involves a crime, must live and die a criminal, just because there is no saying what morning may not bring an accusation against him? As a man who has had to struggle through a whole life against adverse suspicions, I protest against the doctrine of not proven! The world is

too prone to think the worst to make such a practice anything short of an insufferable tyranny."

With a delicacy he was never deficient in, Quackinboss respected the personal application, and made no reply.

"Calumny, too," continued the old man, whose passion was now roused, "is conducted on the division-of-labour principle. One man contributes so much, and another adds so much more; some are clever in suggesting the motive, some indicate the act; others are satisfied with moralizing over human frailties, and display their skill in showing that the crime was nothing exceptional, but a mere illustration of the law of original sin. And all these people, be it borne in mind, are not the bad or the depraved, but rather persons of reputable lives, safe opinions, and even good intentions. Only imagine, then, what the weapon becomes when wielded by the really wicked. I myself was hunted down by honourable men—gentlemen all of them, and of great attainments. Has *he* told you my story?" said he, pointing to his son.

"Yes, sir; and I only say that it couldn't have happened in our country here."

"To be sure it could," retorted the other, quickly; "the only difference is, that you have made Lynch law an institution, and we practise it as a social accident."

Thus chatting, they reached the hotel where they were to lodge till the packet sailed.

The short interval before their departure passed off agreeably to all. Quackinboss never wearied at hearing the Doctor talk, and led him on to speak of America, and what he had seen of the people, with an intense interest.

"Could you live here, sir?" asked Quackinboss, at the close of one of these discussions.

"It is my intention to live and die here," said the Doctor. "I go back to England now, that this boy may pay off a long load of vengeance for me. Ay, Alfred, you shall hear my long-cherished plan at once. I want you to become a fellow of that same University which drove me from its walls. They were not wrong, perhaps—at least, I will not now dispute their right—but I mean to be more in the right than they were. My name shall stand upon their records associated with their proudest achievements, and Layton the scholar, Layton the discoverer, eclipse the memory of Layton the rebel."

This was the dream of many a year of struggle, defeat, and depression, and now that it was avowed, it seemed as though his heart were relieved of a great load of care. As

for Alfred, the goal was one to stimulate all his energies, and he pledged himself fervently to do his utmost to attain it.

"And I must be with you the day you win," cried Quackinboss, with an enthusiasm so unusual with him, that both Layton and his son turned their glances towards him, and saw that his eyes were glassy with tears. Ashamed of his emotion, he started suddenly up, saying, "I'll go and book our berths for Wednesday next."

CHAPTER XLVII

AT ROME.

Let us now return to some of the actors in our drama, who for a while back have been playing out their parts behind the scenes. The Heathcote family, consisting of Sir William and his ward, May Leslie, Mrs. Morris and her late husband's friend, Captain Holmes, were domesticated in a sumptuous residence near the "Pincian," but neither going out into the world nor themselves receiving visitors. Sir William's health, much broken and uncertain as it was, formed the excuse for this reclusion, but the real reason was the fact, speedily ascertained by the Captain, and as speedily conveyed to his daughter, that "Society" had already decided against them, and voted the English family at the Palazzo Balbi as disfranchised.

Very curious and very subtle things are the passively understood decrees of those who in each city of Europe call themselves the "World." The delicate shades by which recognition is separated from exclusion, the fine tints, perceptible only to the eyes of fashion, by which certain frailties are relieved from being classed with grave derelictions, the enduring efficacy of the way in which the smell of the roses will cling to the broken vase of virtue and rescue its fragments from dishonour, are all amongst the strangest and most curious secrets of our civilization.

Were it not for a certain uniformity in the observances, one might be disposed to stigmatize as capricious the severity

occasionally displayed here, while a merciful lenity was exhibited there; but a closer examination will show that some fine discriminating sense is ever at work, capable of distinguishing between genteel vice and the wickedness that forgets conventionalities. As in law, so in morals, no man need criminate himself, but he who does so by an inadvertence is lost. Now the Heathcotes were rich, and yet lived secluded. The world wanted not another count in the indictment against them. A hundred stories were circulated about them. They had come to place the "girl" in a convent. Old Sir William had squandered away all her fortune, and the scheme now was to induce her to turn Catholic and take the veil. "The old fool"—the world is complimentary on these occasions—was going to marry that widow, whom he had picked up at Leamington, or Ems, or Baden-Baden. If the Captain had not kept the Hell in the Circus, he was the very double of the man who had it. At all events, it was better not to have him in the Club, and so the banker, who was to have proposed, withdrew him.

It may be imagined that some very palpable and sufficient cause was at work to induce society thus to stand on the defensive towards these new-comers. Nothing of the kind. All the evidence against them was shadowy; all the charges such as denied detail. They were an odd set; they lived in a strange fashion; they knew nobody; and to accusations like these even spotless integrity must succumb.

Dressed in a *robe de chambre* that would have made the fortune of a French Vaudeville actor, with a gold-tasselled fez, and slippers to match, the Captain sat, smoking a splendid meerschaum, in a well-cushioned chair, while his daughter was engaged at her embroidery, opposite to him. Though it was mid-winter the sun streamed in through the orange-trees on the terrace, and made a rainbow of the spray that dashed from the marble fountain. The room itself combined all the sumptuous luxury we understand by the word "comfort," with the graceful elegance of a Southern existence. There were flowers and fresh air, and the song of birds, to be enjoyed on the softest of sofas and the best carpeted of floors.

A large goblet of some amber-coloured drink, in which a rock of pure ice floated, stood at the Captain's elbow, and he sipped and puffed, with his head thrown well back, in an attitude that to smokers must have some Elysian ecstasy. Nor was his daughter the least ornamental part of the situation. A morning dress of white muslin, tastefully trimmed

with sky-blue ribbons, and a rich fall of Brussels lace over her head, making a very charming picture of the graceful figure that now bent over the embroidery-frame.

"I tell you it won't do, Loo," said he, removing his pipe, and speaking in a firm and almost authoritative voice. "I have been thinking a great deal over it, and you must positively get away from this."

"I know that too," said she, calmly; "and I could have managed it easily enough but for this promised visit of Charles. He comes through on his way to Malta, and Sir William would not hear of anything that risked the chance of seeing him."

"I'd rather risk that than run the hazards we daily do in this place," said he, gravely.

"You forget, papa, that *he* knows nothing of these hazards. He is eager to see his son, for what he naturally thinks may be the last time. I'm sure I did my best to prevent the meeting. I wrote to Lord Agincourt; I wrote to Charles himself. I represented all the peril the agitation might occasion his father, and how seriously the parting might affect a constitution so impressionable as his, but to no purpose; he coldly replies, 'Nothing short of my father's refusal to see me shall prevent my coming to see him,' or 'embrace him,' or—— I forget the words, but the meaning is, that come he will, and that his arrival may be counted on before the end of the week."

"What stay will he make?"

"He speaks of three at four days at farthest. We can learn the limit easily enough by the time of the P. and O. steamer's sailing. Ask for it at the banker's."

"I don't call in there now," said he, peevishly. "Since they took down my name for the club-ballot, I have not gone to the bank."

She sighed heavily; there was more than one care on her heart, and that sigh gathered in a whole group of anxieties.

"They have got up all sorts of stories about us; and it is always out of these false attacks of scandal comes the real assault that storms the citadel."

She sighed again, but did not speak.

"So long as Heathcote keeps the house and sees nobody, all may go on well; but let him be about again, able to ramble amongst the galleries and churches, he is certain to meet some amiable acquaintance, who will startle him with a few home truths. I tell you again, we are banqueting over a powder magazine; and even as to the marriage itself, I

don't like it. Are you aware of the amount he is able to settle? I couldn't believe my eyes when I read the draft. It is neither more nor less than eight thousand pounds. Fancy taking such a husband for eight thousand pounds!"

"You scarcely put the case fairly, papa," said she, smiling; "the eight thousand is the compensation for losing him."

"Are you in love with him, then?" asked he, with a sarcastic twinkle of the eye.

"I don't think so—at least, not to desperation."

"It is scarcely for the sake of being 'My Lady.'"

"Oh dear no, *that* is a snobbery quite beyond me. Now, I neither marry for the title, nor the man, nor his money, nor his station, but out of that mass of motives which to certain women have the force of a principle. I can explain what I mean, perhaps, by an illustration: Were you to tell a fashionable physician, in first-rate practice, that if he got up out of bed at midnight, and drove off two miles to a certain corner of Regent's Park, where, under a particular stone, he'd find a guinea, it is more than certain he'd not stir; but if you sent for the same man to a case of illness, he'd go unhesitatingly, and accept his guinea as the due recompense of his trouble. This is duty, or professional instinct, or something else with a fine name, but it's not gold-seeking. There now, make out my meaning out of my parable, as best you may. And after all, papa, I'm not quite sure that I intend to marry him."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Oh, pray don't be frightened. I merely meant to say that there was an eventuality which might rescue me from this necessity. I have told you nothing about it hitherto, dear papa, because I inherit your own wholesome dislike to entertaining my friends with what may turn out mere moonshine. Now, however, that the project has a certain vitality in it, you shall hear it."

Holmes drew his chair close to her, and, laying down his pipe, prepared to listen with all attention.

"If I hate anything," said she, half peevishly, "it is to talk of the bygone, and utter the names of people that I desire never to hear again. It can't be helped, however; and here goes. After the events in Jersey, you remember I left the island and came abroad. There were all sorts of confusion about H.'s affairs. The law had taken possession of his papers, placed seals on everything, and resisted my application to remove them, on the vexatious plea that I was not his wife, and could not administer as such. A long

litigation ensued, and at last my marriage was admitted, and then I took out probate and received a few thousand pounds, and some little chance property; the bulk of his fortune was, however, in America, and settled on Clara by a will, which certain writings showed was in the possession of her uncle, now nominated to be her guardian, a certain Harvey Winthrop, of Norfolk, Virginia. I opened a correspondence with him, and suggested the propriety of leaving Clara with me, as I had always regarded her as my own child, and hinting at the appropriateness of some allowance for her maintenance and education. He replied with promptitude and much kindness, expressed great sympathy for my late loss, and made a very liberal settlement for Clara.

"All went on peaceably and well for two years, when one morning came a letter from Winthrop of a most alarming nature. Without any positive charge, it went on to say, that he had, for reasons which his delicacy would prefer to spare me, decided on himself assuming the guardianship of his niece, and that if I would kindly come to London, or name any convenient place on the Continent for our meeting, he would punctually present himself at the time agreed on. Of course I guessed what had occurred—indeed, it had always been a matter of astonishment to me how long I had been spared; at all events, I determined on resistance. I wrote back a letter, half sorrow, half indignation; I spoke of the dear child as all that remained of consolation to my widowed heart; I said that though it was in his competence to withhold from me the little pittance which served to relieve some of the pressure of our narrow means, yet I would not separate myself from my darling child, even though at the cost of sharing with her a mere sufficiency for support. I told him, besides, that he should never hear from me more, nor would all his efforts enable him to trace us. It was then I became Mrs. Penthony Morris. I suppose Winthrop was sorry for his step; at least, by a variety of curious advertisements in English papers he suggested that some accommodation might be arranged, and entreated me to renew intercourse with him. There were many reasons why I could not agree to this. Clara, too, was of great use to me. To a lone woman in the world, without any definite belongings, a child is invaluable. The advertisements were continued, and even rewards offered for such information as might lead to my discovery. All in vain: he never succeeded in tracing me, and at length gave up the pursuit.

"I must now skip over some years which have no bearing

on this incident, and come to a period comparatively recent, when, in the transaction of certain purchases of American securities, I came unexpectedly on the mention of a new railroad line through a district whose name was familiar to me. I set myself to think where, when, and how I had heard of this place before, and at last remembered it was from H——, who used to talk of this property as what would one day make his daughter a great heiress. My moneyed speculations had led me into much intimacy here with a banker, Mr. Trover, over whom an accidental discovery gave me absolute power. It was no less than a forgery he had committed on my name, and of which, before relinquishing the right to take proceedings against him, I obtained his full confession in writing. With this tie over the man, he was my slave; I sent him here and there at my pleasure, to buy, and sell, and gain information, and so on, and, above all, to obtain a full account of the value of this American property, where it lay, and how it was occupied. It was in the midst of these inquiries came a great financial crash, and my agent was obliged to fly. At first he went to Malta; he came back, but, after a few weeks, he set out for the States. He was fully in possession of the circumstances of this property, and Clara's right to it, and equally so of my determination that she should never inherit it. We had, on one of the evenings he was here, a long conversation on the subject, and he cunningly asked me,—

" ' How was the property settled in reversion?'

" It was a point I never knew, for I never saw H.'s will.

" ' The will was made four years before his death; might he not have made a later one on his death-bed?—might he not have bequeathed the estate in reversion to yourself in case she died?—might she not have died?'

" All these he asked, and all of them had been my own unceasing thoughts for years back. It was a scheme I had planned and brooded over days and nights long. It was to prepare the road for it that I sent away Clara, and, under the name of Stocmar, had her inscribed at the Conservatoire of Milan. Was it that Trover had read my secret thoughts, or had he merely chanced upon them by mere accident? I did not dare to ask him, for I felt that by his answer *I* should be as much in *his* power as he was in mine.

" ' I have often imagined there might be such a will,' said I; ' there is no reason to suppose it is not in existence. Could it not be searched for and found?'

" He understood me at once, and replied,—

" 'Have you any of Hawke's handwriting by you?'

" 'A quantity,' said I; 'and it is a remarkable hand, very distinctive, and not hard to imitate—at least, by any one skilled in such accomplishments.'

" He blushed a little at the allusion, but laughed it off.

" 'The girl could have died last year; she might have been buried—where shall we say?' added he, carelessly.

" 'At Meisner, in the Tyrol,' said I, catching at the idea that just struck me, for my maid died in that place, and I had got the regular certificate of her death and burial from the Syndic, and I showed him the document.

" 'This is admirable,' said he; 'nothing easier than to erase this name and insert another.'

" 'I cannot hear of such a thing, Mr. Trover,' said I; 'nor can I, after such a proposal, suffer the paper to leave my hands.' And with this I gave it to him.

" 'I could not dream of such an act, madam,' said he, with great seriousness; 'it would amount to a forgery. Now for one last question,' said he, after a little interval of silence: 'what would you deem a suitable reward to the person who should discover this missing will, and restore this property to the rightful owner? Would twenty per cent. on the value appear to you too much?'

" 'I should say that the sum was a high one, but if the individual acquitted himself with all the integrity and all the delicacy the situation demanded, never by even an implication involving any one who trusted him, conducting the transaction to its end on his own responsibility and by his own unaided devices, why, then, it is more than probable that I would judge the reward to be insufficient.'

"So much, dear papa, will put you in possession of the treaty then ratified between us. I was to supply all the funds for present expenses; Mr. Trover to incur all the perils. He was invested with full powers, in fact, to qualify himself for Botany Bay, and I promised to forward his views towards a ticket of leave if the worst were to happen him. It was a very grave treaty very laughingly and playfully conducted. Trover had just tact enough for the occasion, and was most jocose wherever the point was a perilous one. From the letters and papers in my possession, he found details quite ample enough to give him an insight into the nature of the property, and also, what he deemed of no small importance, some knowledge of the character of this Mr. Winthrop, Clara's uncle. This person appeared to be an easy-tempered, good-natured man, not difficult to deal with, nor in any way

given to suspicion. Trover was very prompt in his proceedings. On the evening after our conversation he showed me the draft of Hawke's will, dated at Jersey, about eight days before his death. It was then, for the first time, I learned that Trover knew the whole story, and who *I* was. This rather disconcerted me at first. There are few things more disconcerting than to find out that a person who has for a long intercourse never alluded to your past history, has been all the while fully acquainted with it. The way he showed his knowledge of the subject was characteristic. In pointing out to me Hawke's signature, he remarked,—

"'I have made the witnesses—Towers, who was executed, and Collier, who, I have heard, died in Australia.'

"How familiar you are with these names, sir,' said I, curiously.

"'Yes, madam,' said he; 'I edited a well-known weekly newspaper at that time, and got some marvellous details from a fellow who was on the spot.'

"I assure you, papa, though I am not given to tremors, I shuddered at having for my accomplice a man that I could not deceive as to my past life. It was to be such an open game between us that, in surrendering all the advantages of my womanly arts, I felt I was this man's slave, and yet he was a poor creature. He had the technical craft for simulating a handwriting and preparing a false document, but was miserably weak in providing for all the assaults that must be directed against its authenticity.

"His plan was, armed with what he called an attested copy of H.'s will, to set out for America and discover this Mr. Winthrop. Cleverly enough, he had bethought him of securing this gentleman's co-operation by making him a considerable inheritor under the will. In fact, he charged the estate with a very handsome sum in his favour, and calculated on all the advantages of this bribe; and without knowing it, Mr. Winthrop was to be 'one of us.'

"He sailed in due time, but I heard no more of him; and, indeed, I began to suspect that the two bank-notes I had given him, of one hundred each, had been very unprofitably invested, when by this day's post a letter reaches me to say that success had attended him throughout. By a mere accidental acquaintance on a railroad, he 'fell in' with—that's his phrase, which may mean that he stole—some very curious documents which added to his credit with Winthrop. He describes this gentleman as exactly what he looked for, and with this advantage, that having latterly been somewhat un-

fortunate in speculation, he was the more eager to repair his fortune by the legacy. He says that only one embarrassing circumstance occurred, and this was, that Winthrop determined at once on coming over to England, so that the authenticity of the will should be personally ascertained by him, and all his own proceedings in the matter be made sure. 'For this purpose,' he writes, 'we shall sail from this place by the first steamer for Liverpool, where let me have a letter addressed to the Albion to say where you are to be found. Winthrop's first object will be to meet you, and you must bethink you well what place you will deem most suitable for this purpose. Of course the more secluded and private the better. I have explained to him that, so overwhelmed were you by the terrible event of H.'s death, you had never entered the world since; and, in fact, so averse to anything that might recall the past, that you had never administered to the will, nor assumed any of your rights to property, and it would be well for him, if he could, to arouse you out of this deadly lethargy, and call you back to something like existence. This explained why I had taken the journey out to America to meet him.' You will perceive, papa, that Mr. Trover knows how to lie 'with the circumstance,' and is not unitarian in his notions of falsehood.

"I am far from liking this visit of Mr. Winthrop. I wish from my heart that his scruples had been less nice, and that he had been satisfied to eat his cake without inquiring whether every one else had got his share; but, as he is coming, we must make the best of it. And now, what advice have you to give me? Of course, we cannot suffer him to come here."

"Certainly not, Loo. We must have out the map, and think it over. Does Trover tell you what amount the property may be worth?"

"He says that there are three lots. Two have been valued at something over a million of dollars; the third—if the railroad be carried through it—will be more valuable still. It is, he says, an immense estate, and in high productiveness. Let us, however, think of our cards, papa, and not the stake; there is much to provide. I have no certificate of my marriage with Hawke."

"That must be thought of," said he, musingly.

"Clara, too, must be thought of—married, if possible, to some one going abroad—to Australia or New Zealand. Perhaps O'Shea." And she burst out a laughing at the thought.

"Or Paten. I'd say Ludlow——"

A look of sickly aversion crossed his daughter's face at the suggestion, and she said,—

"Nothing on earth would induce me to consent to it."

The Captain might have regarded this as a woman's weakness, but he said nothing.

"It will be very difficult for me to get away at this moment, too," said she, after a pause. "I don't fancy being absent while young Heathcote is here. He will be making all manner of inquiries about Clara; where she is, with whom, and for what? If I were on the spot I could suppress such perquisitions."

"After all, dear Loo, the other is the great event. I conclude, if all goes smoothly about this work, you'll never dream of the marriage with Sir William?"

"Perhaps not," said she, roguishly. "I am not so desperately in love as to do an imprudence. There is, however, much to be thought of, papa. In a few days more Ludlow is to be back here with my letters, more than ever necessary at this moment, when any scandal might be fatal. If he were to know anything of this accession of fortune, his demands would be insupportable."

"No doubt of that. At the same time, if he merely hears that your marriage with the Baronet is broken off, he will be more tractable. How are you to obtain these letters?"

"I don't know," said she, with a stolid look.

"Are you to buy them?"

"I don't know."

"He will scarcely surrender them out of any impulse of generosity?"

"I don't know," said she, again; and over her features there was a sickly pallor that changed all their expression, and made her look even years older than she was. He looked at her compassionately, for there was that in her face that might well have challenged pity.

"But, Loo, dearest," said he, encouragingly, "place the affair in my hands, and see if I cannot bring it to a good ending."

"He makes it a condition to treat with none but myself, and there is a cowardice in this of which he knows all the advantage."

"It must be a question of money, after all. It is a matter of figures."

"He would say not. At the very moment of driving his hardest bargain he would interpose some reference to what he is pleased to call 'his feelings.' I told him that even Shylock

did not insult his victim with a mock sympathy, nor shed false tears over the pain his knife was about to inflict."

"It was not the way to conciliate him, Loo."

"Conciliate him! Oh, how you know him!" She pressed her hands over her face as she spoke, and when she withdrew them the cheeks were scalded with tears.

"Come, come, Loo, this is scarcely like yourself."

"There, it's over now," said she, smiling, with a half-sad look, as she pushed her hair back, as though to suffer the cool air to bathe her forehead. "Oh dear!" sighed she out, "if I only could have foreseen all the perils before me, I might have borne with George Ogden, and lived and died what the world calls respectable."

He gave a little sigh too, which might have meant that he agreed with her, or that the alternative was a hard one, or that respectability was a very expensive thing for people of small means, or a little of all three together, which was most probable, since the Captain rarely dealt in motives that were not sufficiently mixed.

"And now, papa," said she, "use your most ingenious devices to show me how I am to answer all these engagements, and while I meet Mr. Winthrop in Switzerland, contrive also to be on guard here, and on outpost duty with Mr. Ludlow Paten."

"You'll do it, Loo—you'll do it, or nobody else will," said he, sipping his iced drink, and gazing on her approvingly.

"What would you say to Brengenz for our rendezvous with Winthrop?" said she, bending over the map. "It is as quiet and forgotten a spot as any I know of."

"So it is, Loo; and one of the very few where the English never go, or, at least, never sojourn."

"I wish we could manage to find a small house or a cottage there. I should like to be what dramatists call 'discovered' in a humbly furnished chamber, living with my dear old father, venerable in years and virtues."

"Well, it ought not to be difficult to manage. If you like, I'll set off there and make the arrangements. I could start this evening."

"How good of you! Let me think a little over it, and I will decide. It would be a great comfort to me to have you here when Charles Heathcote comes. I might need your assistance in many ways, but perhaps—— Yes, you had better go; and a pressing entreaty on your part for me to hasten to the death-bed of my 'poor aunt' can be the reason for my own hurried departure. Is it not provoking how many

embarrassments press at the same moment? It is an attack front, rear, and on the flanks."

"You're equal to it, dear—you're equal to it," said he, with the same glance of encouragement.

"I almost think I should go with you, papa—take French leave of these good people, and evacuate the fortress—if it were not that next week I expect Ludlow to be back here with the letters, and I cannot neglect *that*. Can you explain it to me," cried she, more eagerly, "there is not one in this family for whom I entertain the slightest sense of regard—they are all less than indifferent to me—and yet I would do anything—endure anything—rather than they should learn my true history, and know all about my past life; and this, too, with the certainty that we were never to meet again?"

"That is pride, Loo—mere pride."

"No," said she, tremulously, "it is shame. The consciousness that one's name is never to be uttered but in scorn in those places where once it was always spoken of in honour—the thought that the fair fame we had done so much to build up should be a dreary ruin, is one of the saddest the heart can feel; for, let the world say what it will, we often give all our energies to hypocrisy, and throw passion into what we meant to be mere acting. Well, well, enough of moralizing, now for action. You will want money for this trip, papa; see if there be enough there." And she opened her writing-desk, and pushed it towards him.

The Captain took out his double eye-glass, and then, with due deliberation, proceeded to count over a roll of English notes fresh from the bank.

"In funds, I see, Loo," said he, smiling.

"It is part of the last three hundred I possess in the world. I drew it out yesterday, and, as I signed the cheque, I felt as might a sailor going over the side as his ship was sinking. Do you know," said she, hurriedly, "it takes a deal of courage to lead the life I have done."

"No doubt—no doubt," muttered he, as he went on counting. "Forty-five, fifty, fifty-five——"

"Take them all, papa; I have no need of them. Before the month ends I mean to be a millionaire, or 'My Lady.'"

"I hope not the latter, Loo; I hope sincerely not, dearest. It would be a cruel sacrifice, and really for nothing."

"A partnership in an old-established house," said she, with a mocking laugh, "is always something; but I won't prejudge events, nor throw my cards on the table till I have lost the game. And à propos to losing the game, suppose that

luck should turn against us suppose—that we fail to supply some essential link in this chain of fortune—suppose that Trover should change his mind and sell us—suppose, in short, anything adverse you please,—what means are remaining to you, papa? Have you enough to support us in some cheap unfrequented spot at home or abroad?"

"I could get together about two hundred and forty pounds a year, not more."

"One could live upon that, couldn't one?" asked she.

"Yes, in a fashion. With a number of privations you have never experienced, self-denial in fifty things you have never known to be luxuries, with a small house and small habits and small acquaintances, one could rub through, but no more."

"Oh, how I should like to try it!" cried she, clasping her hands together. "Oh, what would I not give to pass one year—one entire year of life—without the ever-present terror of exposure, shame, and scorn—to feel that when I lie down to rest at night a knock at the street door should not throw me into the cold perspiration of ague, or the coming of the postman set my heart a-throbbing, as though the missive were a sentence on me! Why cannot I have peace like this?"

"Poverty has no peace, my dear Loo. It is the poorest of all wars, for it is the pettiest of all objects. It would break my heart to see you engaged in such a conflict."

And the Captain suffered his eyes to range over the handsome room and its fine furniture, while his thoughts wandered to a French cook, and that delicious "Château Margaux" he had tasted yesterday.

Did she read what was passing in his mind, as with a touch of scorn in her manner, she said, "Doubtless you know the world better," and left the room?

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE PALAZZO BALBI.

The household of the Palazzo Balbi was unusually busy and active. There was a coming and a parting guest. Sir William himself was far too much occupied by the thoughts of his son's arrival to bestow much interest upon the departure of Captain Holmes. Not that this ingenious gentleman had failed in any of the requirements of his parasitical condition, nay, he had daily improved the occasion of his presence, and ingratiated himself considerably in the old Baronet's favour; but it is, happily, the lot of such people to be always forgotten where the real affections are in play. They while away a weary day—they palliate the small irritations of daily life—they suggest devices to cheat ennui—but they have no share in deeper sentiments; we neither rejoice nor weep with them.

"Sorry for your friend's illness!"—"Sincerely trust you may find him better!"—or, "Ah, it is a lady, I forgot; and that we may soon see you on this side of the Alps again!"—"Charming weather for your journey!"—"Good-bye, good-bye!"

And with this he shook his hand cordially enough, and forgot him.

"I'm scarcely sorry he's gone," said May, "he was *so* deaf! And besides, papa, he was too civil—too complaisant. I own I had become a little impatient of his eternal compliments, and the small scraps out of Shelley and Keats that he adapted to my address."

"All the better for Charley, that," said the old Baronet. "You'll bear his rough frankness with more forgiveness after all this sugary politeness." He never noticed how this random speech sent the blood to her cheeks, and made her crimson over face and neck; nor, indeed, had he much time to bestow on it, for the servant opened the door at the instant, and announced, "Captain Heathcote." In a moment the son was in his father's arms. "My boy, my dear boy," was all the old man could say, and Charles, though determined to maintain the most stoical calm

throughout the whole visit, had to draw his hand across his eyes in secret.

"How well you look, Charley—stouter and heavier than when here. English life and habits have agreed with you, boy."

"Yes, sir. If I can manage to keep my present condition, I'm in good working trim for a campaign; and you—tell me of yourself."

"There is little to say on that subject. When men live to my term, about the utmost they can say is, that they are here."

Though he tried to utter these words in a half jocular tone, his voice faltered, and his lips trembled; and as the young man looked, he saw that his father's face was careworn and sad, and that months had done the work of years on him since they parted. Charles did his utmost to treat these signs of sorrow lightly, and spoke cheerfully, and even gaily.

"I'd go with your merry humour, boy, with all my heart, if you were not about to leave us."

Was it anything in the interests thus touched on, or was it the chance phrase, "to leave *us*," that made young Heathcote become pale as death while he asked, "How is May?"

"Well—quite well; she was here a moment back. I fancied she was in the room when you came in. I'll send for her."

"No, no; time enough. Let us have a few more minutes together."

In a sort of hurried, and not very collected way, he now ran on to talk of his prospects and the life before him. It was easy to mark how the assumed slap-dash manner was a mere mask to the bitter pain he felt and that he knew he was causing. He talked of India as though a few days' distance—of the campaign, like a hunting party; the whole thing was a sort of eccentric ramble, to have its requital in plenty of incident and adventure. He even assumed all the vulgar slang about "hunting down the niggers," and coming back loaded with "loot," when the old man threw his arm around him, and said,—

"But not to me, Charley—not to *me*."

The chord was touched at last. All the pretended careless ease was gone, and the young man sobbed aloud as he pressed his father to his breast. The secret which each wanted to keep to his own heart was out, and now they must not try any longer a deception.

"And why must it be, Charley? what is the urgent cause for deserting me? I have more need of you than ever I had. I want your counsel and your kindness; your very presence—as I feel it this moment—is worth all my doctors."

"I think you know—I think I told you, I mean—that you are no stranger to the position I stood in here. You never taught me, father, that dependence was honourable. It was not amongst your lessons that a life of inglorious idleness was becoming." As with a faltering and broken utterance he spoke these words, his confusion grew greater and greater, for he felt himself on the very verge of a theme that he dreaded to touch, and at last, with a great effort, he said, "And besides all this, I had no right to sacrifice another to my selfishness."

"I don't understand you, Charley."

"Maybe not, sir; but I am speaking of what I know for certain. But let us not go back on these things."

"What are they? Speak out, boy," cried he, more eagerly.

"I see you are not aware of what I thought you knew. You do not seem to know that May's affections are engaged —that she has given her heart to that young college man who was here long ago as Agincourt's tutor. They have corresponded."

"Corresponded!"

"Yes, I know it all, and she will not deny it—nor need she, from all I can learn. He is a fine-hearted fellow, worthy of any girl's love. Agincourt has told me some noble traits of him, and he deserves all his good fortune."

"But to think that she should have contracted this engagement without consulting me—that she should have written to him——"

"I don't see how you can reproach her, a poor motherless girl. How could she go to you with her heart full of sorrows and anxieties? She was making no worldly compact in which she needed your knowledge of life to guide her."

"It was treachery to us all!" cried the old man, bitterly, for now he saw to what he owed his son's desertion of him.

"It was none to *me*, so much I will say, father. A stupid compact would have bound her to her unhappiness, and this she had the courage to resist."

"And it is for this I am to be forsaken in my old age!" exclaimed he, in an accent of deep anguish. "I can never forgive her—never!"

Charles sat down beside him, and, with his arm on the old

man's shoulder, talked to him long in words of truest affection. He recalled to his mind the circumstances under which May Leslie first came amongst them, the daughter of his oldest, dearest friend, entrusted to his care, to become, one day, his own daughter, if she willed it.

"Would you coerce her to this? Would you profit by the authority you possess over her to constrain her will? Is it thus you would interpret the last dying words of your old companion? Do not imagine, father, that I place these things before you in cold blood or indifference. I have my share of sorrow in the matter." He was going to say more, but he stopped himself, and arising, walked towards the window. "There she is!" cried he, "on the terrace; I'll go and meet her." And with this he went out.

It is not impossible that the generous enthusiasm into which Charles Heathcote had worked himself to subdue every selfish feeling about May enabled him to meet her with less constraint and difficulty. At all events, he came towards her with a manner so like old friendship, that, though herself confused, she received him with equal cordiality.

"How like old times, May, is all this," said he, as, with her arm within his own, they strolled under a long vine trellis. "If I had not to remember that next Wednesday I must be at Malta, I could almost fancy I had never been away. I wonder when we are to meet again? and where, and how?"

"I'm sure it is not I that can tell you," said she, painfully, for in the attempt to conceal his emotion his voice had assumed a certain accent of levity that wounded her deeply.

"The where matters little, May," resumed he; "but the when is much, and the how still more."

"It is fortunate, then, that this is the only point I can at all answer for, for I think I can say that we shall meet pretty much as we part."

"What am I to understand by that, May?" asked he, with an eagerness that forgot all dissimulation.

"How do you find papa looking?" asked she, hurriedly, as a deep blush covered her face. "Is he as well as you hoped to see him?"

"No," said he, bluntly; "he has grown thin and careworn. Older by ten years than I expected to find him."

"He has been much fretted of late; independently of being separated from *you*, he has had many anxieties."

"I have heard something of this; more, indeed, than I like to believe true. Is it possible, May, that he intends to marry?"

She nodded twice slowly, without speaking.

"And his wife is to be this Mrs. Morris—this widow that I remember at Marlia, long ago?"

"And who is now here domesticated with us."

"What do you know of her? What does any one know of her?" asked he, impatiently.

"Absolutely nothing; that is, of her history, her family, or her belongings. Of herself I can only say that she is supreme in this house; her orders alone are obeyed. I have reason to believe that papa confides the gravest interests to her charge, and for myself, I obey her by a sort of instinct."

"But you like her, May?"

"I am too much afraid of her to like her. I was at first greatly attracted by fascinations perfectly new to me, and by a number of graceful accomplishments, which certainly lent a great charm to her society. But after a while I detected, or I fancied that I detected, that all these attractions were thrown out as lures to amuse and occupy us, while she was engaged in studying our dispositions and examining our natures. Added to this, I became aware of the harshness she secretly bestowed upon poor Clara, whose private lectures were little else than tortures. This latter completely estranged me from her, and, indeed, was the first thing which set me at work to consider her character. From the day when Clara left this——"

"Left this, and for where?" cried he.

"I cannot tell you; we have never heard of her since. She was taken away by a guardian, a certain Mr. Stocmar, whom papa seemed to know, or at least thought he had met somewhere, many years ago. It was shortly after the tidings of Captain Morris's death this gentleman arrived here to claim her."

"And her mother; was she willing to part with her?"

"She affected great sorrow—fainted, I think—when she read the letter that apprised her of the necessity; but from Clara herself I gathered that the separation was most grateful to her, and that for some secret cause I did not dare to ask—even had she known to tell—they were not to meet again for many, many years."

"But all that you tell me is unnatural, May. Is there not some terrible mystery in this affair? Is there not some shameful scandal beneath it all?"

A heavy sigh seemed to concur with what he said.

"And can my father mean to marry a woman of whose past life he knows nothing? Is it with all these circumstances of

suspicion around her that he is willing to share name and fortune with her?"

"As to that, such is her ascendancy over him, that were she to assure him of the most improbable or impossible of events he'd not discredit her. Some secret dread of what you would say or think has delayed the marriage hitherto, but once you have taken your leave and are fairly off—not to return for years—the event will no longer be deferred."

"Oh, May, how you grieve me. I cannot tell you the misery you have put into my heart."

"It is out of my own sorrow I have given you to drink," said she, bitterly. "You are a man, and have a man's career before you, with all its changeful chances of good or evil; I, as a woman, must trust my hazard of happiness to a home, and very soon I shall have none."

He tried to speak, but a sense of choking stopped him, and thus, without a word on either side, they walked along several minutes.

"May," said he, at last, "do you remember the line of the poet,—

"Death and absence differ but in name?"

"I never heard it before; but why do you ask me?"

"I was just thinking that in parting moments like this, as on a death-bed, one dares to speak of things which from some sense of shame one had never dared to touch on before. Now, I want to carry away with me over the seas the thought that your lot in life is assured, and your happiness, so far as any one's can be, provided for. To know this, I must force a confidence which you may not wish to accord me; but bethink you, dear May, that you will never see me more. Will you tell me if I ask about *him?*"

"About whom?" asked she, in unfeigned astonishment, for never were her thoughts less directed to Alfred Layton.

"May," said he, almost angrily, "refuse me if you will, but let there be no deceit between us. I spoke of Layton."

"Ask what you please, and I will answer you," said she, boldly.

"He is your lover, is he not? You have engaged yourself to him?"

"No."

"It is the same thing. You are to be his wife, when this, that, or t'other happens?"

"No."

"In a word, if there be no compact, there is an understanding between you?"

"Once more, no!" said she, in the same firm voice.

"Will you deny that you have received letters from him, and have written to him again?"

An angry flush covered the girl's cheek, and her lip trembled. For an instant it seemed as if an indignant answer would break from her, but she repressed the impulse, and coolly said, "There is no need to deny it. I have done both."

"I knew it—I knew it!" cried he, in a bitter exultation. "You might have dealt more frankly with me, or might have said, 'I am in no wise accountable to *you*. I recognize no right in you to question me.' Had you done this, May, it would have been a warning to me, but to say, 'Ask me freely, I will tell you everything,' was this fair, was this honest, was it true-hearted?"

"And yet I meant it for such," said she, sorrowfully. "I may have felt a passing sense of displeasure that you should have heard from any other than myself of this correspondence, but even that is passed away, and I care not to learn from whom you heard it. I have written as many as three letters to Mr. Layton. This is his last to *me*." She took at the same moment a letter from her pocket, and handed it towards him.

"I have no presumption to read your correspondence, May Leslie," said he, red with shame and anger together. "Your asking me to do so implies a rebuke in having dared to speak on the subject, but it is for the last time."

"And is it because we are about to part, Charles, that it must be in anger?" said she; and her voice faltered and her lip trembled. "Of all your faults, Charles, selfishness was not one, long ago."

"No matter what I was long ago; we have both lived to see great changes in ourselves."

"Come, let us be friends," said she, taking his hand cordially. "I know not how it is with you, but never in my life did I need a friend so much.

"Oh, May, how can I serve you?"

"First read that letter, Charles. Sit down there and read it through, and I'll come back to you by the time you've finished it."

With a sort of dogged determination to sacrifice himself, no matter at what cost, Charles Heathcote took the letter from her, and turned away into another alley of the garden.

CHAPTER L.

THREE MET AGAIN.

When, on the following morning, Charles Heathcote repaired to the hotel where he had left his friend Lord Agincourt, he was surprised to hear the sound of voices and laughter as he drew nigh the room; nor less astonished was he, on entering, to discover O'Shea seated at the breakfast-table, and manifestly in the process of enjoying himself. Had there been time to retire undetected, Heathcote would have done so, for his head was far too full of matters of deep interest to himself to desire the presence of a stranger, not to say that he had a communication to make to his friend both delicate and difficult. O'Shea's quick glance had, however, caught him at once, and he cried out, "Here's the very man we wanted to make us complete—the jolliest party of three that ever sat down together."

"I scarcely thought to see you in these parts," said Heathcote, with more of sulk than cordiality in the tone.

"Your delight ought to be all the greater, though, maybe, it isn't! You look as glum as the morning I won your trap and the two nags."

"By the way, what became of them?" asked Heathcote.

"I sold the chestnut to a young cornet in the Carabineers. He saw me ride him through all the bonfires in Sackville Street the night the mob beat the police, and he said he never saw his equal to face fire; and he wasn't far wrong there, for the beast was stone blind."

"And the grey?"

"The grey is here, in Rome, and in top condition; and if I don't take him over five feet of timber my name isn't Gorman." A quick wink and a sly look towards Agincourt conveyed to Heathcote the full meaning of this speech.

"And you want a high figure for him?" asked he.

"If I sell him—if I sell him at all; for you see, if the world goes well with me, and I have a trump or two in my hand, I won't part with that horse. It's not every day in the week that you chance on a beast that can carry fifteen

stone over a stiff country—ay, and do it four days in the fortnight!"

"What's his price?" asked Agincourt.

"Let him tell you," said O'Shea, with a most expressive look at Heathcote. "He knows him as well or better than I do."

"Yes," said Heathcote, tantalizing him on purpose; "but when a man sets out by saying, 'I don't want to sell my horse,' of course it means, 'If you will have him, you must pay a fancy price.'"

If O'Shea's expression could be rendered in words, it might be read thus, "And if that be the very game I'm playing, ain't you a downright idiot to spoil it?"

"Well," said Agincourt, after a pause, "I'm just in the sort of humour this morning to do an extravagant thing, or a silly one."

"Lucky fellow!" broke in Heathcote, "for O'Shea's the very man to assist you to your project."

"I am!" said O'Shea, firmly and quickly; "for there's not the man living has scattered his money more freely than myself. Before I came of age, when I was just a slip of a boy, about nineteen——"

"Never mind the anecdote, old fellow," said Heathcote, laughingly, as he laid his hand on the other's shoulder. "Agincourt has just confessed himself in the frame of mind to be 'done.' Do him, therefore, by all means. Say a hundred and fifty for the nag, and he'll give it, and keep your good story for another roguery."

"Isn't he polite?—isn't he a young man of charming manners and elegant address?" said O'Shea, with a strange mixture of drollery and displeasure.

"He's right, at all events," said Agincourt, laughing at the other's face—"he's right as regards me. I'll give you a hundred and fifty for the horse without seeing him."

"Oh, mother of Moses! I wish your guardian was like you."

"Why so? What do you mean?"

"I mean this—that I wish he'd buy *me*, too, without seeing me!" And then, seeing that by their blank looks they had failed to catch his meaning, he added, "Isn't he one of the Cabinet now?"

"Yes, he is Colonial Secretary."

"That's the very fellow I want. He's giving away things every day, that any one of them would be the making of me."

"What would you take?"

"Whatever I'd get. There's my answer, whatever I'd get. I'd be a Bishop, or a Judge, or a boundary Commissioner, or a Treasurer—I'd like to be that best—or anything in reason they could offer a man of good family, and who had a seat in the House."

"I think you might get him something—I'm sure you might," said Heathcote.

"Well, I can try, at all events. I'll write to-day."

"Will you really?"

"I give you my word on it. I'll say that, independently of all personal claims of your own, you're an intimate and old friend, whose advancement I will accept as a favour done to myself."

"That's the ticket. But mind no examination—no going before the Civil Service chaps. I tell you fairly, I wouldn't take the Governor-Generalship of India if I had to go up for the multiplication-table. I think I see myself sitting trembling before them, one fellow asking me, 'Who invented "pitch and toss?"' and another inquiring 'Who was the first man ever took pepper with oysters?'"

"Leave all that to Agincourt," said Heathcote; "he'll explain to his guardian that you were for several sessions a distinguished member of the House——"

"'Twas I that brought 'crowing' in. I used to crow like a cock when old Sibthorp got up, and set them all off laughing."

"I'll mention your public services——"

"And don't say that I'm hard up. Don't make it appear that it's because I'm out at the elbows I'm going, but just a whim—the way Gladstone went to Greece the other day; that's the real dodge, for they keep the Scripture in mind up in Downing Street, and it's always the 'poor they send empty away.'"

"And you'll dine with us here, at seven?" said Agincourt, rising from the table.

"That's as much as to say, 'Cut your lucky now, Gorman; we don't want you till dinner-time.'"

"You forget that he has got the letter to write about you," said Heathcote. "You don't want him to lose a post?"

"And the grey horse?"

"He's mine; I've bought him."

"I suppose you've no objection to my taking a canter on him this morning?"

"Ride him, by all means," said Agincourt, shaking his hand cordially while he said adieu.

"Why did you ask him to dinner to-day?" said Heathcote, peevishly. "I wanted you to have come over and dined with us. My father is eager to see you, and so is May."

"Let us go to tea, then. And how are they?—how is he looking?"

"Broken—greatly broken. I was shocked beyond measure to see him so much aged since we met, and his spirits gone—utterly gone."

"Whence is all this?"

"He says that I deserted him—that he was forsaken."

"And is he altogether wrong, Charley? Does not conscience prick you on that score?"

"He says, too, that I have treated May as cruelly and as unjustly; also, that I have broken up their once happy home. In fact, he lays all at *my* door."

"And have you seen *her?*"

"Yes, we had a meeting last night, and a long talk this morning; and, indeed, it was about that I wanted to speak to you when I found O'Shea here. Confound the fellow! he has made the thing more difficult than ever, for I have quite forgotten how I had planned it all."

"Planned it all! Surely there was no need of a plan, Charley, in anything that you meant to say to *me?*"

"Yes, but there was, though. You have very often piqued me by saying that I never knew my own mind from one day to another, that you were always prepared for some change of intention in me, and that nothing would surprise you less than that I should 'throw you over' the very day before we were to sail for India."

"Was I very, very unjust, Charley?" said he, kindly.

"*I* think you were, and for this reason: he who is master of his own fate, so far as personal freedom and ample fortune can make him, ought not to judge rashly of the doubts, and vacillations, and ever changing purposes of him who has to weigh fifty conflicting influences. The one sufficiently strong to sway others may easily take his line and follow it; the other is the slave of any incident of the hour, and must be content to accept events, and not mould them."

"I read it all, Charley. You'll not go out?"

"I will not."

Agincourt repressed the smile that was fast gathering on his lips, and, in a grave and quiet voice, said, "And why?"

"For the very reason you have so often given me. She

cares for me; she has told me so herself, and even asked me not to leave them! I explained to her that I had given you not only a promise, but a pledge, that, unless you released me, I was bound in honour to accompany you. She said, 'Will you leave this part of the matter to *me?*' and I answered, 'No, I'll go frankly to him, and say, "I'm going to break my word with you: I have to choose between May Leslie and you, and I vote for her."'"

"What a deal of self-sacrifice it might have saved you, Charley," said he, laughing, "had you seen this telegram which came when I had sat down to breakfast." It came from the Horse Guards, sent by some private friend of Agincourt's, and was in these words, "The row is over, no more drafts for India, do not go.'"

Heathcote read and re-read the paper for several minutes. "So then, for once, I have luck on my side. My resolve neither wounds a friend nor hurts my own self-esteem. Of course *you*'ll not go?"

"Certainly not. I'll not go out to hunt the lame ducks that others have wounded."

"You'll let me take this and show it to my father," said Heathcote. "He shall learn the real reason of my stay hereafter, but, for the present, this will serve to make him happy; and poor May, too, will be spared the pain of thinking that in yielding to her wish, I have jeopardized a true friendship. I can scarcely believe all this happiness real, Agincourt. After so long a turn of gloom and despondency, I cannot trust myself to think that fortune means so kindly by me. Were it not for one unhappy thought—one only—I could say I have nothing left to wish for."

"And what is that?—Is it anything in which I can be of service to you?"

"No, my dear fellow; if it were, I'd never have said it was a cause for sorrow. It is a case, however, equally removed from your help as from mine. I told you some time back that my father, yielding to a game of cleverly-played intrigue, had determined to marry this widow, Mrs. Penthony Morris, whom you remember. So long as the question was merely mooted in gossip, I could not allude to it, but when he wrote himself to me on the subject, I remonstrated with him as temperately as I was able. I adverted to their disproportion of age, their dissimilarity of habits; and, lastly, I spoke out and told him that we knew nothing, any of us, of this lady, her family, friends, or connections; that though I had enquired widely, I never met the man who could give me any infor-

mation about her, or had ever heard of her husband. I wrote all this, and much more of the same kind, in the strain of frank confidence a son might employ towards his father, particularly when they had long lived together in relations of the dearest and closest affection. I waited eagerly for his answer. Some weeks went over, and then there came a letter, not from him, but from her. The whole mischief was out: he had given her my letter, and said, 'Answer it.' I will show you her epistle one of these days. It is really clever. There wasn't a word of reproach—not an angry syllable in the whole of it. She was pained, fretted, deeply fretted by what I had written, but she acknowleged that I had, if I liked to indulge them, reasonable grounds for all my distrusts, though, perhaps, it might have been more generous to oppose them. At first, she said, she had resolved to satisfy all my doubts by the names and circumstances of her connections, with every detail of family history and fortune, but, on second thoughts, her pride revolted against a step so offensive to personal dignity, and she had made up her mind to confine these revelations to my father, and then leave his roof for ever. 'Writing,' continued she, 'as I now do, without his knowledge of what I say—for, with a generous confidence in me that I regret is not felt in other quarters, he has refused to read my letter—I may tell you that I shall place my change of purpose on such grounds as can never possibly endanger your future relations with your father. He shall never suspect, in fact, from anything in my conduct, that my departure was influenced in the slightest degree by what has fallen from *you*. The reasons I will give him for my step will refer solely to circumstances that refer to myself. Go back, therefore, in all confidence and love, and give your whole affection to one who needs and who deserves it!'

"There was, perhaps, a slight tendency to dilate upon what ought to constitute my duties and regards, but, on the whole, the letter was well written and wonderfully dispassionate. I was sorely puzzled how to answer it, or what course to take, and might have been more so, when my mind was relieved by a most angry epistle from my father, accusing me roundly, not only of having wilfully forsaken him, but having heartlessly insulted the very few who compassionated his lonely lot, and were even ready to share it.

"This ended our correspondence, and I never wrote again till I mentioned my approaching departure for India, and offered, if he wished it, to take Italy on my way and see him

once more before I went. To this there came the kindest answer, entreating me to come and pass as many days as I could with him. It was all affection, but evidently written in great depression of mind and spirits. There were three lines of a postscript, signed 'Louisa,' assuring me that none more anxiously looked forward to my visit than herself; that she had a pardon to crave of me, and would far rather sue for it in person than on paper. 'As you *are* coming,' said she, 'I will say no more, for when you *do* come, you will both pity and forgive me.'"

As Heathcote had just finished the last word, the door of the room was quietly opened, and O'Shea peeped in. "Are you at the letter? for, if you are, you might as well say, 'Mr. Gorman O'Shea was never violent in his politics, but one of those who always relied upon the good faith and good will of England towards his countrymen.' That's a sentence the Whigs delight in, and I remark it's the sure sign of a good berth."

"Yes, yes, I'll book it; don't be afraid," said Agincourt, laughing; and the late member for Inch retired, fully satisfied. "Go on, Charley; tell me the remainder."

"There is no more to tell; you have heard all. Since I arrived I have not seen her. She has been for two days confined to bed with a feverish cold, and, apprehending something contagious, she will not let May visit her. I believe, however, it is a mere passing illness, and I suppose that to-morrow or next day we shall meet."

"And *how?* for that, I own, is a matter would puzzle me considerably."

"It will all depend upon her. She must give the key-note to the concert. If she please to be very courteous and affable, and all the rest of it, talk generalities and avoid all questions of real interest, I must accept that tone, and follow it. If she be disposed to enter upon private and personal details, I have only to be a listener, except she give me an opportunity to speak out regarding the marriage."

"And you will?"

"That I will. I suspect shrewdly that she is mistaken about our circumstances, and confounds May Leslie's means with ours. Now, when she knows that my father has about five hundred a year in the world for everything, it is just possible that she may rue her bargain, and cry 'off.'"

"Scarcely, I think," said Agincourt. "The marriage would give her station and place at once, if she wants them."

"What if O'Shea were to supplant Sir William? I half suspect he would succeed. He hasn't a sixpence. It's exactly his own beat to find some one willing to support him."

"Well, I'll back myself to get him a place. I'll not say it will be anything very splendid or lucrative, but something he shall have. Come, Charley, leave this to me. Let O'Shea and myself dine *tête-à-tête* to-day, and I'll contrive to sound him on it."

"I mean to aid you so far, for I know my father would take it ill were I to dine away from home—on the first day, too; but I own I have no great confidence in your plan, nor any unbounded reliance on your diplomacy."

"No matter, I'll try it; and, to begin, I'll start at once with a letter to Downing Street. I have never asked for anything yet, so I'll write like one who cannot contemplate a refusal."

"I wish you success, for all our sakes," said Charles; and left him.

CHAPTER LI.

THE LONE VILLA ON THE CAMPAGNA.

About half way between Rome and Albano, and something more than a mile off the high road, there stands on a little swell of the Campagna, a ruined villa, inhabited by a humble family of peasants, who aid their scanty means of support by showing to strangers the view from the house-top. It is not, save for its extent, a prospect in any way remarkable. Rome itself, in the distance, is not seen in its most imposing aspect, and the Campagna offers little on which the eye cares to rest long.

The "Villa of the Four Winds," however, is a place sought by tourists, and few leave Rome without a visit to it. These are, of course, the excursions of fine days in the fine season, and never occur during the dark and gloomy months of mid-winter. It was now such a time. The wind tore

across the bleak plain, carrying fitful showers of cold rain, driving cattle to their shelter, and sending all to seek a refuge within doors, and yet a carriage was to be seen toiling painfully through the deep clay of the by-road which led from the main line, and making for the villa. After many a rugged shake and shock, many a struggling effort of the weary beasts, and many a halt, it at length reached the little paved courtyard, and was speedily surrounded by the astonished peasants, curious to see the traveller whose zeal for the picturesque could bid defiance to such weather.

As the steps were let down, a lady got out, muffled in a large cloak, and wearing the hood over her head, and hastily passed into the little kitchen of the house. Scarcely had she entered, than, throwing off her cloak, she said, in a gay and easy voice, "I have often promised myself a visit to the villa when there would be a grand storm to look at. Don't you think that I have hit on the day to keep my pledge?" The speech was made so frankly that it pleased the hearers, nowise surprised, besides, at any eccentricity on the part of strangers; and now the family, young and old, gathered around the visitor, and talked, and questioned, and admired her dress and her appearance, and told her so, too, with a pleasant candour not displeasing. They saw she was a stranger, but knew not from where. Her accent was not Roman; they knew no more; nor did she give much time for speculating, as she contrived to make herself at home amongst them by ingratiating herself imperceptibly into the good graces of each present, from the grey-headed man to whom she discoursed of cattle and their winter food, to the little toddling infant, who would insist upon being held upon her lap.

The day went on, and yet never a lull came in the storm that permitted a visit to the roof to see the lightning that played along the distant horizon. She betrayed no impatience, however; she laughingly said she was very comfortable at the fireside, and could afford to wait. She expected her brother, it is true, to have met her there, and more than once despatched a messenger to the door to see if he could not descry a horseman on the high road. The same answer came always back: nothing to be seen for miles round.

"Well," said she, good humouredly, "you must give me a share of your dinner, for my drive has given me an appetite, and I will still wait here another hour."

It would have made a pleasing picture as she sat there—her fair and beautiful features graced with that indescribable charm of expression imparted by the wish to please in those

who have made the art to please their study—to have seen her surrounded by those bronzed, and seared, and careworn looks, now brightened up by the charm of a spell that had often worked its power on their superiors, to have marked how delicately she initiated herself into their little ways, and how marvellously the captivation of her gentleness spread its influence over them. In their simple piety they likened her to the image of all that embodies beauty to their eyes, and murmured to each other that she was like the Madonna. A cruel interruption to their quiet rapture was now given by the clattering sound of a horse's feet, and, immediately after, the entrance of a man drenched to the skin, and dripping from the storm. After a few hasty words of greeting, the strangers ascended the stairs and were shown into a little room, scantily furnished, but from which the view they were supposed to come for could be obtained.

"What devotion to come out in such weather!" said she, when they were alone. "It is only an Irishman, and that Irishman the O'Shea, could be capable of this heroism."

"It's all very nice making fun of a man when he's standing like a soaked sponge," said he; "but I tell you what, Mrs. Morris, the devil a Saxon would do it. It's not in them to risk a sore-throat or a pain in the back for the prettiest woman that ever stepped."

"I have just said so, but not so emphatically, perhaps and, what is more, I feel all the force of the homage as I look at you."

"Well, laugh away," said he. "When a woman has pretty teeth or good legs she doesn't want much provocation to show them. But, if we are to stay any time here, couldn't we have a bit of fire?"

"You shall come down to the kitchen presently, and have both food and fire, for I'm sure there's something left, though we've just dined."

"Dined?—where?"

"Well, eaten, if you like the word better; and perhaps it is the more fitting phrase. I took my plate amongst these poor people, and I assure you there was a carrot soup by no means bad. Sir William's *chef* would have probably taken exception to the garlic, which was somewhat in excess, and there was a fishy flavour, also slightly objectionable. They called it 'baccala.'"

"Faith, you beat me entirely!" exclaimed O'Shea. "I can't make you out at all, at all."

"I assure you," resumed she, "it was quite refreshing to

dine with people who ate heartily, and never said an ill word of their neighbours. I regret very much that you were not of the party."

"Thanks for the politeness, but I don't exactly concur with the regret."

"I see that this wetting has spoiled your temper. It is most unfortunate for me that the weather should have broken just as I wanted you to be in the very best of humours, and with the most ardent desire to serve me."

If she began this speech in a light and volatile tone, before she had finished it her manner was grave and earnest.

"Here I am, ready and willing," said he, quickly. "Only say the word, and see if I'm not as good as my promise."

She took two or three turns of the room without speaking, then wheeling round suddenly, she stood right in front of where he sat, her face pale, and her whole expression that of one deeply occupied with one purpose.

"I don't believe," said she, in a slow, collected voice," that there exists a more painful position than that of a woman who, without what the world calls a natural protector, must confront the schemes of a man with the inferior weapons of her sex, and who yet yearns for the privilege of setting a life against a life."

"You'd like to be able to fight a duel, then?" asked he, gravely.

"Yes. That my own hand might vindicate my own wrong, I'd consent freely to lose it the hour after."

"That must needs have been no slight injury that suggests such a reparation."

She only nodded in reply.

"It is nothing that the Heathcotes——"

"The Heathcotes!" broke she in, with a scornful smile; "it is not from such come heavy wrongs. No, no; they are in nowise mixed up in what I allude to, and if they had been, I would need no help to deal with them. The injury I speak of occurred long ago—years before I knew you. I have told you"—here she paused, as if for strength to go on—"I have told you that I accept your aid, and on your own conditions. Very few words will suffice to show for what I need it. Before I go further, however, I would ask you once more, are you ready to meet any and every peril for my sake? Are you prepared to encounter what may risk even your life, if called upon? I ask this now, and with the firm assurance that if you pledge your word you will keep it."

"I give you my solemn oath that I'll stand by you, if it lead me to the drop before the gaol."

She gave a slight shudder. Some old memories had, perhaps, crossed her at the moment; but she was soon self-possessed again.

"The case is briefly this. And mind," said she, hurriedly, "where I do not seem to give you full details, or enter into clear explanations, it is not from inadvertence that I do so, but that I will tell no more than I wish, nor will I be questioned. The case is this: I was married unhappily. I lived with a man who outraged and insulted me, and I met with one who assumed to pity me and take my part. I confided to him my miseries, the more freely that he had been the witness of the cruelties I endured. He took advantage of the confidence to make advances to me. My heart—if I had a heart—would not have been difficult to win. It was a theft not worth guarding against. Somehow, I cannot say wherefore, this man was odious to me, more odious than the very tyrant who trampled on me; but I had sold myself for a vengeance—yes, as completely as if the devil had drawn up the bond and I had signed it. My pact with myself was to be revenged on him, come what might afterwards. I have told you that I hated this man; but I had no choice. The whole wide world was there, and not another in it had ever offered to be my defender; nor, indeed, did he. No, the creature was a coward; he only promised that if he found me as a waif he would shelter me; he was too cautious to risk a finger in my cause, and would only claim what none disputed with him. And I was abject enough to be content with that, to be grateful for it, to write letters full of more than gratitude, protesting—— Oh, spare me! if even yet I have shame to make me unable to repeat what, in my madness, I may have said to him. I thought I could go on throughout it all, but I cannot. The end was, my husband died; yes! he was dead! and this man—who I know, for I have the proofs, had shown my letters to my husband—claimed me in marriage; he insisted that I should be his wife, or meet all the shame and exposure of seeing my letters printed and circulated through the world, with the story of my life annexed. I refused, fled from England, concealed myself, changed my name, and did everything I could to escape discovery; but in vain. He found me out; he is now upon my track; he will be here—here, at Rome—within the week, and, with these letters in his hand, repeat his threat, he says, for the last time, and I believe him." The strength which had sustained her up to

this now gave way, and she sank heavily to the ground, like one stricken by a fit. It was some time before she rallied, for O'Shea, fearful of any exposure, had not called others to his aid, but, opening the window, suffered the rude wind to blow over her face and temples. "There, there," said she, smiling sadly, "it is but seldom I show so poor a spirit, but I am somewhat broken of late. Leave me to rest my head on this chair, and do not lift me from the ground yet. I'll be better presently. Have I cut my forehead?"

"It is but a slight scratch. You struck the foot of the table in your fall."

"There," said she, making a mark with the blood on his wrist, "it is thus the Arabs register the fidelity of him who is to avenge them. You will not fail me, will you?"

"Never, by this hand!" cried he, holding it up firmly clenched over his head.

"It's the Arab's faith, that if he wash away the stain before the depth of vengeance is acquitted, he is dishonoured; there's a rude chivalry in the notion that I like well." She said this in his ear as he raised her from the ground and placed her on a chair. "It is time you should know his name," said she, after a few minutes' pause. "He is called Ludlow Paten. I believe he is Captain Paten about town."

"I know him by repute. He's a sort of swell at the West-end play clubs. He is amongst all the fast men."

"Oh, he's fashionable—he's very fashionable."

"I have heard him talked of scores of times as one of the pleasantest fellows to be met with."

"I'm certain of it. I feel assured that he must be a cheerful companion, and reasonably honest and loyal in his dealings with man. He is of a class that reserve all their treachery and all their baseness for where they can be safely practised; and, strange enough, men of honour know these things—men of unquestionable honour associate freely with fellows of this stamp, as if the wrong done to a woman was a venial offence, if offence at all."

"The way of the world," said O'Shea, with a half sigh.

"Pleasant philosophy that so easily accounts for every baseness and even villany by showing that they are popular. But come, let us be practical. What's to be done here?—what do you suggest?"

"Give me the right to deal with him, and leave the settlement to *me*."

"The right—that is——" She hesitated, flushed up for an instant, and then grew lividly pale again.

"Yes," said he, taking his place at her side, and leaning an arm on the back of her chair, "I thought I never saw your equal when you were gay and light-hearted, and full of spirits; but I like you better, far better now, and I'd rather face the world with you than——"

"I don't want to deceive you." said she, hurriedly, and her lips quivered as she spoke, "but there are things which I cannot tell you—things of which I could not speak to any one, least of all to him who says he is willing to share his fate with me. It is a hard condition to make, and yet I must make it."

"Put your hand in mine, then, and I'll take you on any conditions you like."

"One word more before we close our bargain. It might so happen—it is far from unlikely—that the circumstances of which I dare not trust myself to utter a syllable may come to your ears when I am your wife, when it will be impossible for you to treat them as calumnies, and just as idle to say that you never heard of them before. How will you act if such a moment comes?"

"Answer me one plain question first. Is there any man living who has power over you—except as regards these letters, I mean?"

"None."

"There is, then, no charge of this, that, or t'other?"

"I will answer no more. I have told you fairly that if you take me for your wife you must be prepared to stand in the breach between me and the world, and meet whatever assails me as one prepared. Are you ready for this?"

"I'm not afraid of the danger——"

"So, then, your fears are only for the cause?"

It was with the very faintest touch of scorn these words were spoken, but he marked it, and reddened over face and forehead.

"When that cause will have become my own, you'll see that I'll hesitate little about defending it."

"That's all that I ask for, all that I wish. This is strange courtship," said she, trying to laugh; "but let us carry it through consistently. I conclude you are not rich; neither am I—at least, for the present; a very few weeks, however, will put me in possession of a large property. It is in land in America. The legal formalities which are necessary will be completed almost immediately, and my co-heir is now coming over from the States to meet me, and establish his claim also. These are all confidences, remember, for I now speak

to you freely; and, in the same spirit that I make them, I ask *you* to trust *me*—to trust me fully and wholly, with a faith that says, 'I will wait to the end—to the very end!'"

"Let this be my pledge," said he, taking her hand and kissing it. "Faith!" said he, after a second or two, "I can scarcely believe in my good luck. It seems to be every moment so like a dream to think that you consent to take me; just, too, when I was beginning to feel that fortune had clean forgotten me. You are not listening to me, not minding a word I say. What is it, then, you are thinking of?"

"I was plotting," said she, gravely.

"Plotting—more plotting! Why can't we go along now on the high road, without looking for by-paths?"

"Not yet—not yet awhile. Attend to me, now. It is not likely that we can meet again very soon. My coming out here to-day was at great risk, for I am believed to be ill, and in bed with a feverish cold. I cannot venture to repeat this peril, but you shall hear from me. My maid is to be trusted, and will bring you tidings of me. With to-morrow's post I hope to learn where Paten is, and when he will be here. You shall learn both immediately, and be prepared to act on the information. Above all things, bear in mind that though I hate this man, all my abhorrence of him is nothing—actually nothing—to my desire to regain my letters. For them I would forego everything. Had I but these in my possession I could wait for vengeance, and wait patiently."

"So that from himself personally you fear nothing?"

"Nothing. He cannot say more of me than is open to all the world to say——" She stopped, and grew red, for she felt that her impetuosity had carried her further than she was aware. "Remember once more, then, if you could buy them, steal them, get them in any way—I care not how, that my object is fulfilled—the day you place them in this hand it is your own!"

He burst out into some rhapsody of his delight, but checked himself as suddenly, when he saw that her face had assumed its former look of preoccupation.

"Plotting again?" asked he, half peevishly.

"I have need to plot," said she, mournfully, as she leaned her head upon her hand; and now there came over her countenance a look of deepest sorrow. "I grow very weary of all this at times," said she, in a faint and broken voice; "so weary, that I half suspect it were better to throw the cards down, and say 'There! I've lost! What's the stake?' I

believe I could do this. I am convinced I could, if I were certain that there was one man or one woman on the earth who would give me one word of pity, or bestow one syllable of compassion for my fall."

"But surely your daughter Clara——"

"Clara is not my daughter; she is nothing to me; never was, never can be. We are separated, besides, never to meet again, and I charge you not to speak of her."

"May I never! if I can see my way at all. It's out of one mystery into another. Will you just tell me——"

"Ask me nothing. You have heard from me this day what I have never told another. But I have confidence in your good faith, and can say, 'If you rue your bargain there is yet time to say so,' and you may leave this as free as when you entered it."

"You never mistook a man more. It's not going back I was thinking of; but surely I might ask——"

"Once for all, I will not be questioned. There never lived that man or woman who could thread their way safely through difficulties, if they waited to have every obstacle canvassed and every possible mystery explained. You must leave me to my own guidance here, and one of its first conditions is, not to shake my confidence in myself."

"Won't you even tell me when we're to be one?"

"What an ardent lover it is," said she, laughing. "There, fetch me my shawl, and let me see that you know how to put it properly on my shoulders. No liberties, sir! and least of all when they crush a Parisian bonnet. The evening is falling already, and I must set off homewards."

"Won't you give me a seat in the carriage with you? Surely, you'd not see me ride back in such a downpour as that."

"I should think I would. I'd leave you to go it on foot rather than commit such an indiscretion. Drive back to Rome with Mr. O'Shea alone! What would the world say? What would Sir William Heathcote say, who expects to make me Lady Heathcote some early day next month?"

"By the way, I heard that story. An old fellow, called Nick Holmes, told me——"

"What old Nick told you could scarcely be true. There, will you order the carriage to the door, and give these good people some money? Ain't you charmed that I give you one of a husband's privileges so early? Don't dare to answer me; an Irishman never has the discretion to reply to a liberty as he ought. Is that poor beast yours?" asked she,

as they gained the door, and saw a horse standing, all shivering and wretched, under a frail shed.

"He was this morning, but I had the good luck to sell him before I took this ride."

"I must really compliment you," said she, laughing heartily. "A gentleman who makes love so economically ought to be a model of order when a husband." And with this she stepped in, and drove away.

CHAPTER LII.

A DINNER OF TWO.

The O'Shea returned to Rome at a "slapping pace." He did his eight miles of heavy ground within forty minutes. But neither the speed nor the storm could turn his thoughts from the scene he had just passed through. It was with truth he said that he could not give credit to the fact of such good fortune as to believe she would accept him; and yet the more he reflected on the subject, the more was he puzzled and disconcerted. When he had last seen her she refused him—refused him absolutely and flatly; she even hinted at a reason that seemed unanswerable, and suggested that, though they might aid each other as friends, there could be no co-partnership of interests. "What has led her to this change of mind, Heaven knows. It is no lucky turn of fortune on my side can have induced it; my prospects were never bleaker. And then," thought he, "of what nature is this same secret, or rather these secrets, of hers, for they seem to grow in clusters? What can she have done? or what has Penthony Morris done? Is he alive? Is he at Norfolk Island? Was he a forger, or worse? How much does Paten know about her? What power has he over her besides the possession of these letters? Is Paten Penthony Morris?" It was thus that his mind went to and fro, like a surging sea, restless and not advancing. Never was there a man more tortured by his conjectures. He knew that she might marry Sir William Heathcote if she liked; why, then, prefer himself to a man

of station and fortune? Was it that he was more likely to enact the vengeance she thirsted for than the old baronet? Ay, that was a reasonable calculation. She was right there, and he'd bring Master Paten "to book," as sure as his name was O'Shea. That was the sort of thing he understood as well as any man in Europe. He had been out scores of times, and knew how to pick a quarrel, and to aggravate it, and make it perfectly beyond all possibility of arrangement, as well as any fire-eater of a French line regiment. That was, perhaps, the reason of the widow's choice of him. If she married Heathcote, it would be a case for lawyers: a great trial at Westminster, and a great scandal in the papers. "But with me it will be all quiet and peaceable. I'll get back her letters, or I'll know why."

He next bethought him of her fortune. He wished she had told him more about it—how it came to her—was it by settlement—was it from the Morrises? He wished, too, it had not been in America; he was not quite sure that property there meant anything at all; and, lastly, he brought to mind that though he had proposed for dozens of women, this was the only occasion he was not asked what he could secure by settlement, and how much he would give as pin-money. No, on that score she was delicacy itself, and he was one to appreciate all the refinement of her reserve. Indeed, if it came to the old business of searches, and showing titles, and all the other exposures of the O'Shea family, he felt that he would rather die a bachelor than encounter them. "She knew how to catch me! 'A row to fight through, and no questions asked about money, O'Shea,' says she. 'Can you resist temptation like that?'"

As he alighted at the hotel, he saw Agincourt standing at a window, and evidently laughing at the dripping, mud-stained appearance he presented.

"I hope and trust that wasn't the nag I bought this morning," said he to O'Shea, as he entered the room.

"The very same; and I never saw him in finer heart. If you only witnessed the way he carried me through those ploughed fields out there! He's strong in the loins as a cart-horse."

"I must say that you appear to have ridden him as a friend's horse. He seemed dead beat, as he was led away."

"He's fresh as a four-year old."

"Well, never mind, go and dress for dinner, for you're half an hour behind time already."

O'Shea was not sorry to have the excuse, and hurried off to make his toilet.

Freytag was aware that his guest was a "Milor'," and the dinner was very good, and the wine reasonably so; and the two, as they placed a little spider-table between them before the fire, seemed fully conscious of all the enjoyment of the situation.

Agincourt said, "Is not this jolly?" And so it was. And what is there jollier than to be about sixteen or seventeen years of age, with good health, good station, and ample means? To be launched into manhood, too, as a soldier, without one detracting sense of man's troubles and cares—to feel that your elders condescend to be your equals, and will even accept your invitation to dinner!—ay, and more, practise towards you all those little flatteries and attentions which, however vapid ten years later, are positive ecstasies now!

But of all its glorious privileges there is not one can compare with the boundless self-confidence of youth, that implicit faith not alone in its energy and activity, its fearless contempt for danger, and its indifference to hardships, but, more strange still, in its superior sharpness and knowledge of life! Oh dear! are we not shrewd fellows when we matriculate at Christ Church, or see ourselves gazetted Cornet in the Horse Guards Purple? Who ever equalled us in all the wiles and schemes of mankind? Must he not rise early who means to dupe us? Have we not a registered catalogue of all the knaveries that have ever been practised on the unsuspecting? Truly have we; and if suspicion were a safeguard, nothing can harm us.

Now, Agincourt was a fine, true-hearted, generous young fellow—manly and straightforward—but he had imbibed his share of this tendency. He fancied himself subtle, and imagined that a nice negotiation could not be entrusted to better hands. Besides this, he was eager to impress Heathcote with a high opinion of his skill, and show that even a regular man of the world like O'Shea was not near a match for him.

"I'm not going to drink that light claret such an evening as this," said O'Shea, pushing away his just-tasted glass. "Let us have something a shade warmer."

"Ring the bell, and order what you like."

"Here, this will do—'Clos Vougeot,'" said O'Shea, pointing out to the waiter the name on the wine "carte."

"And if that be a failure, I'll fall back on brandy-and-

water, the refuge of a man after bad wine, just as disappointed young ladies take to a convent. If you can drink that little tipple, Agincourt, you're right to do it. You'll come to Burgundy at forty, and to rough port ten years later; but you've a wide margin left before that. How old are you?"

"I shall be seventeen my next birthday," said the other, flushing, and not wishing to add that there were eleven months and eight days to run before that event should come off.

"That's a mighty pretty time of life. It gives you a clear four years for irresponsible follies before you come of age. Then you may fairly count upon three or four more for legitimate wastefulness, and with a little, very little, discretion, you never need know a Jew till you're six-and-twenty."

"I beg your pardon, my good fellow," said the other, colouring, half angrily; "I've had plenty to do with those gents already. Ask Nathan whether he hasn't whole sheafs of my bills. My guardian only allows me twelve hundred a year—a downright shame they call it in the regiment, and so I wrote him word. In fact, I told him what our Major said, that with such means as mine I ought to try and manage an exchange into the Cape Rifles."

"Or a black regiment in the West Indies," chimed in O'Shea, gravely.

"No, confound it, he didn't say that!"

"The Irish Constabulary, too, is a cheap corps. You might stand that."

"I don't mean to try either," said the youth, angrily.

"And what does Nathan charge you?—say for a 'thing' at three months?"

"That all depends upon the state of the money-market," said Agincourt, with a look of profoundest meaning. "It is entirely a question of the foreign exchanges, and I study them like a stockbroker. Nathan said one day, 'It's a thousand pities he's a Peer; there's a fellow with a head to beat the whole Stock Exchange.'"

"Does he make you pay twenty per cent., or five-and-twenty for short dates?"

"You don't understand it at all. It's no question of that kind. It's always a calculation of what gold is worth at Amsterdam, or some other place, and it's a difference of, maybe, one-eighth that determines the whole value of a bill."

"I see," said O'Shea, puffing his cigar very slowly. "I

have no doubt that you bought your knowledge on these subjects dearly enough."

"I should think I did! Until I came to understand the thing, I was always 'outside the ropes,' always borrowing with the 'exchanges against me'—you know what I mean?"

"I believe I do," said O'Shea, sighing heavily. "They have been against me all my life."

"That's just because you never took trouble to study the thing. You rushed madly into the market whenever you wanted money, and paid whatever they asked."

"I did indeed! and, what's more, was very grateful if I got it."

"And I know what came of that—how that ended."

"How?"

"Why you dipped your estate, gave mortgages, and the rest of it."

O'Shea nodded a full assent.

"Oh, *I* know the whole story; I've seen so much of this sort of thing. Well, old fellow," added he, after a pause, "if I'd been acquainted with you ten or fifteen years ago, I could have saved you from all this ruin."

O'Shea repressed every tendency to a smile, and nodded again.

"I'd have said to you, 'Don't be in a hurry, watch the market, and I'll tell you when to "go in."'"

"Maybe it's not too late yet, so give me a word of friendly advice," said O'Shea, with a modest humility. "There are few men want it more."

There was now a pause of several minutes, O'Shea waiting to see how his bait had taken, and Agincourt revolving in his mind whether this was not the precise moment for opening his negotiation. At last he said,—

"I wrote that letter I promised you. I said you were an out-and-outer as to ability, and that they couldn't do better than make you a Governor somewhere, though you'd not be disgusted with something smaller. I've been looking over the vacancies; there's not much open. Could you be a Mahogany Commissioner at Honduras?"

"Well, so far as having had my legs under that wood for many years with pleasure to myself and satisfaction to my friends, perhaps I might."

"Do you know what I'd do if I were you?"

"I have not an idea."

"I'd marry—by Jove, I would!—I'd marry!"

"I've thought of it half a dozen times," said he, stretching

out his hand for the decanter, and rather desirous of escaping notice; "but, you see, to marry a woman with money—and of course it's that you mean—there's always the inquiry what you have yourself, where it is, and what are the charges on it. Now, as you shrewdly guessed a while ago, I dipped my estate—dipped it so deep that I begin to suspect it won't come up again."

"But look out for a woman that has her fortune at her own disposal."

"And no friends to advise her."

O'Shea's face, as he said this, was so absurdly droll, that Agincourt laughed aloud. "Well, as you observe, no friends to advise her. I suppose you don't care much for connection —I mean rank?"

"As for the matter of family, I have enough for as many wives as Bluebeard, if the law would let me have them."

"Then I fancy I know the thing to suit you. She's a stunning pretty woman besides."

"Where is she?"

"At Rome here."

"And who is she?"

"Mrs. Penthony Morris, the handsome widow, that's on a visit to the Heathcotes. She must have plenty of tin, I can answer for that, for old Nathan told me she was in all the heavy transfers of South American shares, and was a buyer for very large amounts."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I can give my word on it. I remember his saying one morning, 'The widow takes her losses easily; she minds twelve thousand pounds no more than I would a five-pound note.'"

"They have a story here that she's going to marry old Heathcote."

"Not true—I mean, that she won't have him."

"And why? It was clear enough she was playing that game for some time back."

"I wanted Charley to try his chance," said Agincourt, evading the question, "but he is spooney on his cousin May, I fancy, and has no mind to do a prudent thing."

"But how am I to go in?" said O'Shea, timidly. "If she's as rich as you say, would she listen to a poor out-at elbows Irish gentleman, with only his good blood to back him?"

"You're the man to do it—the very man."

O'Shea shook his head.

"I say you'd succeed. I'd back you against the field."

"Will you make me a bet on it?"

"With all my heart! What shall it be?"

"Lay me a hundred to one, in tens, and I give you my solemn word of honour I'll do my very best to lose my wager and win the widow."

"Done! I'll bet you a thousand pounds to ten: book it, with the date, and I'll sign it."

While Agincourt was yet speaking, O'Shea had produced a small note-book, and was recording the bet. Scarcely had he clasped the little volume again, when the waiter entered, and handed him a note.

O'Shea read it rapidly, and finishing off his glass, refilled and drank it. "I must leave you for half an hour," said he, hastily. "There's a friend of mine in a bit of a scrape with one of these French officers; but I'll be back presently."

"I say, make your man fight. Don't stand any bullying with those fellows."

O'Shea did not wait for his counsels, but hurried off.

"This way, sir," whispered a man to him, as he passed out into the court of the hotel; "the carriage is round the corner."

He followed the man, and in a few minutes found himself in a narrow by-street, where a single carriage was standing. The glass was quietly let down as he drew near, and a voice he had no difficulty in recognizing said, "I have just received a most urgent letter, and I must leave Rome to-morrow at daybreak, for Germany. I have learned, besides, that Paten is at Baden. He was on his way here, but stopped to try his luck at the tables. He has twice broken the bank, and swears he will not leave till he has succeeded a third time. We all well know how such pledges finish. But you must set off there at once. Leave to-morrow night, if you can, and by the time you arrive, or the day after, you'll find a letter for you at the post, with my address, and all your future directions. Do nothing with Paten till you hear; mind that—nothing. I have not time for another word, for I am in terror lest my absence from the house should be discovered. If anything imminent occur, you shall hear by telegraph."

"Let me drive back with you; I have much to say, much to ask you," said he, earnestly.

"On no account. There, good-bye—don't forget me."

While he yet held her hand, the word was given to drive on, and his farewell was lost in the rattling of the wheels over the pavement.

"Well, have you patched it up, or is it a fight?" asked Agincourt when he entered the room once more.

"You'll keep my secret, I know," said O'Shea, in a whisper. "Don't even breathe a word to Heathcote, but I'll have to leave this to-morrow, get over the nearest frontier, and settle this affair."

"You'd like some cash, wouldn't you?—at all events, I am your debtor for that horse. Do you want more?"

"There, that's enough—two hundred will do," said O'Shea, taking the notes from his fingers; "even if I have to make a bolt of it, that will be ample."

"This looks badly for your wager, O'Shea. It may lose you the widow, I suspect."

"Who knows?" said O'Shea, laughing. "Circular sailing is sometimes the short cut on land as well as sea. If you have any good news for me from Downing Street, I'll shy you a line to say where to send; and so, good-bye."

And Agincourt shook his hand cordially, but not without a touch of envy as he thought of the mission he was engaged in.

CHAPTER LIII.

SOME LAST WORDS.

While Agincourt and O'Shea thus sat and conversed together, there was another fireside which presented a far happier picture, and where old Sir William sat, with his son and May Leslie, overjoyed to think that they were brought together again, and to separate no more. Charles had told them that he had determined never to leave them, and all their thoughts had gone back to the long, long ago, when they were so united and so happy. There was, indeed, one theme which none dared to touch. It was ever and anon uppermost in the mind of each, and yet none had courage to adventure on it, even in allusion. It was in one of the awkward pauses which this thought produced that a servant came to say Mrs. Morris would be glad to see Charles in her room. He had more than once requested permission to visit her, but somehow, now,

the invitation had come ill-timed, and he arose with a half impatience to obey it.

During the greater part of that morning, Charles Heathcote had employed himself in imagining by what process of persuasion, what line of argument, or at what price, he could induce the widow herself to break off the engagement with his father. The guarded silence Sir William had maintained on the subject since his son's arrival was to some extent an evidence that he knew his project could not meet approval. Nor was the old man a stranger to the fact that May Leslie's manner to the widow had long been marked by reserve and estrangement. This, too, increased Sir William's embarrassment, and left him more isolated and alone. "How shall I approach such a question and not offend her?" was Charles's puzzle, as he passed her door. So full was he of the bulletins of her indisposition, that he almost started as he saw her seated at a table, writing away rapidly, and looking, to his thinking, as well as he had ever seen her.

"This is indeed a pleasant surprise," said he, as he came forward. "I was picturing to myself a sick-room and a sufferer, and I find you more beautiful than ever."

"You surely couldn't imagine I'd have sent for you if I were not conscious that my paleness became me, and that my dressing-gown was very pretty. Sit down—no, here—at my side; I have much to say to you, and not very long to say it. If I had not been actually overwhelmed with business, real business, too, I'd have sent for you long ago. I could imagine with very little difficulty what was uppermost in your mind lately, and how, having determined to remain at home, your thoughts would never quit one distressing theme —you know what I mean. Well, I repeat, I could well estimate all your troubles and difficulties on this head, and I longed for a few minutes alone with you, when we could speak freely and candidly to each other, no disguise, no deception on either side. Shall we be frank with each other?"

"By all means."

"Well, then, you don't like this marriage. Come, speak out honestly your mind."

"Why, when I think of the immense disproportion in age; when I see on one side——"

"Fiddle faddle! If I were seventy it wouldn't make it better. I tell you, I don't want fine speeches nor delicate evasions, therefore be the blunt, straightforward fellow you used to be, and say, 'I don't like it at all.'"

"Well, here goes, I do *not* like it at all."

"Neither do I," said she, lying back listlessly in her chair, and looking calmly at him. "I see what is passing in your mind, Charles. I read your thoughts in their ebb and flow, and they come to this, 'Why have you taken such consummate pains about an object you would regret to see accomplished? To what end all your little coquetries, and graces, and so forth? Well, the question is reasonable enough, and I'll give you only one answer. It amused *me*, and it worried others. It kept poor May and yourself in a small fever, and I have never through life had self-command enough to deny myself the pleasure of terrifying people at small cost, making them fancy they were drowning in two feet of water."

"I hope May is grateful; I am sure *I* am," said Charles, stiffly.

"Well, if you have not been in the past, I intend you to be so for the future. I mean to relinquish the great prize I had so nearly won; to give up the distinguished honour of being your stepmother, with all the rights and privileges I could have grouped around that station. I mean to abdicate all my power; to leave the dear Heathcotes to the enjoyment of such happiness as their virtues and merits cannot fail to secure them, under the simple condition that they will forget me, or, if that be more than they can promise, that they will never make me the subject of their discussions, nor bring up my name, either in praise or blame. Now understand me aright, Charles," said she, earnestly; "this is no request prompted by any pique of injured pride or wounded self-love. It is not uttered in the irritation of one who feels rejected by you. It is a grave demand, made as the price of an important concession. I exact that my name be not spoken, or, if uttered by others in your presence, that it be unacknowledged and unnoticed. It is no idle wish, believe me; for who are the victims of the world's calumnies so often as the friendless, whose names call forth no sponsor? They are the outlaws that any may wound, or even kill, and their sole sanctuary is oblivion."

"I think you judge us harshly," began Charles.

But she stopped him:

"No, far from it. I know you all by this time. You are far more generously minded than your neighbours, but there is one trait attaches to human nature everywhere. Every one exaggerates any peril he has passed through, and every man and woman is prone to blacken the character of those

who have frightened them. Come, I'll not discuss the matter further. I have all those things to pack up, and some notes to write before I go."

"Go! Are you going away so soon?"

"To-morrow, at daybreak. I have got tidings of a sick relative, an old aunt, who was very fond of me long ago, and who wishes to have me near her. I should like to see May, and, indeed, Sir William, but I believe it will be better not: I mean, that partings are gratuitous sorrows. You will say all that I wish. You will tell them how it happened that I left so hurriedly. I'm not sure," added she, smiling, "that your explanation will be very lucid or very coherent, but the chances are, none will care to question you too closely. Of course you will repeat all my gratitude for the kindness I have met here. I have had some of my happiest days with you," added she, as if thinking aloud; "days in which I half forgot the life of trouble that was to be resumed on the morrow. And, above all, say," said she, with earnestness, "that when they have received my debt of thanks they are to wipe out my name from the ledger, and remember me no more."

Charles Heathcote was much moved by her words. The very calm she spoke in had all its effect, and he felt he knew not what of self-accusation as he thought of her lonely and friendless lot. He could not disabuse his mind of the thought that it was through offended pride she was relinquishing the station she had so long striven to attain, and now held within her very grasp. "She is not the selfish creature I had deemed her; she is far, far better than I believed. I have mistaken her, misjudged her. That she has gone through much sorrow, is plain; that there may be in her story incidents which she would grieve to see a town talk, is also likely; but are not all these reasons the more for our sympathy and support, and how shall we answer to ourselves hereafter for any show of neglect or harshness towards her?"

While he thus reflected, she had turned to the table and was busy writing.

"I have just thought of sending a few farewell lines to May," said she, talking away as her pen ran along the paper. "We all of us mistake each other in this world: we are valued for what we are not, and deemed deficient in what we have." She stopped, and then crumpling up the half-written paper in her hand, said: "No, I'll not write—at least, not now. You'll tell her everything—ay, Charles, everything!"

Here she fixed her eyes steadfastly on him, as though to look into his very thoughts. "You and May Leslie will be married, and one of your subjects of mysterious talk when you're all alone—will be that strange woman who called herself Mrs. Penthony Morris. What wise guesses and shrewd conjectures do I fancy you making; how cunningly you'll put together fifty things that seem to illustrate her story, and yet have no bearing upon it; and how cleverly you'll construct a narrative for her without one solitary atom of truth. Well, she'll think of you, too, but in a different spirit, and she will be happier than I suspect if she do not often wish to live over again the long summer days and starry nights at Marlia."

"May is certain to ask me about Clara, where she is, and if we are likely to see her again."

"And you'll tell her, that as I did not speak of her, your own delicacy imposed such a reserve that you could not ask these questions. Good-bye. But that I want to be forgotten, I'd give you a keepsake. Good-bye—and forget me."

She turned away at the last word, and passed into an inner room. Charles stood for an instant or two irresolute, and then walked slowly away.

CHAPTER LIV.

FOUND OUT.

Quackinboss and the Laytons came back in due time to England, and at once hastened to London. They had traced Winthrop and Trover at Liverpool, and heard of their having left for town, and thither they followed them in all eagerness. The pursuit had now become a chase, with all its varying incidents of good or bad fortune. Each took his allotted part, going out of a morning on his especial beat, and returning late of an evening to report his success or failure.

Quackinboss frequented all the well-known haunts of his countrymen, hoping to chance upon some one who had seen Winthrop, or could give tidings of him. Old Layton—the Doctor, as we shall for the remainder of our brief space call him—was more practical. He made searches for Hawke's will at Doctors' Commons, and found the transcript of a brief document irregularly drawn, and disposing of a few thousand pounds, but not making mention of any American property. He next addressed himself to that world-known force, so celebrated in all the detection of crime; he described the men he sought for, and offered rewards for their discovery, carefully protesting the while that nothing but a vague suspicion attached to them.

As for Alfred, he tried to take his share in what had such interest for the others. He made careful notes of the points assigned to him for investigation; he learned names, and addresses, and references to no end; he laboured hard to imbue himself with the zeal of the others, but it would not do. All his thoughts, hopes, and wishes had another direction, and he longed impatiently for an opportunity to make his escape from them, and set out for Italy and discover Clara. His only clue to her was through Stocmar, but that gentleman was abroad, and not expected for some days in London. Little did the Doctor or Quackinboss suspect that Alfred's first call on every morning was at the private entrance of the Regent's Theatre, and his daily question as invariably the same demand, "When do you expect Mr. Stocmar in town?"

Poor fellow! he was only bored by that tiresome search, and hated every man, woman, and child concerned in the dismal history; and yet no other subject was ever discussed —no other theme brought up amongst them. In vain Alfred tried to turn the conversation upon questions of public interest; by some curious sympathy they would not be drawn away into that all-absorbing vortex, and start from what point they might, they were certain to arrive at last at the High Court of Jersey.

It was on one evening, as they sat together around the fire, that, by dint of great perseverance and consummate skill, Alfred had drawn them away to talk of India and the war there. Anecdotes of personal heroism succeeded, and for every achievement of our gallant fellows at Lucknow, Quackinboss steadily quoted some not less daring exploit of the Mexican war. Thus discussing courage, they came at last to the nice question—of its characteristics in different nations, and even in individuals.

"In cool daring, in confronting peril with perfect collectedness, and such a degree of self-possession as confers every possible chance of escape on its possessor, a woman is superior to us all," said the Doctor, who for some time had been silently reflecting. "One case particularly presents itself to my mind," resumed he. "It was connected with that memorable trial at Jersey."

Alfred groaned heavily, and pushed back his chair from the group.

"The case was this," continued the old man: "while the police were eagerly intent on tracing out all who were implicated in the murder, suspicion being rife on every hand, every letter that passed between the supposed confederates was opened and read, and a strict watch set over any who were believed likely to convey messages from one to the other.

"On the evening of the inquest—it was about an hour after dark—the window of an upper room was gently opened, and a woman's voice called out to a countryman below, 'Will you earn half-a-crown, my good man, and take this note to Dr. Layton's, in the town?' He agreed at once, and the letter and the bribe were speedily thrown into his hat. Little did the writer suspect it was a policeman in disguise she had charged with her commission! The fellow hastened off with his prize to the magistrate, who, having read the note, resealed it, and forwarded it to me. Here it is. I have shown it to so many that its condition is become very frail, but it is still readable. It was very brief, and ran thus:

"'DEAR FRIEND,—My misery will plead for me if I thus address you. I have a favour to ask, and my broken heart tells me you will not refuse me. I want you to cut me off a lock of my darling's hair. Take it from the left temple, where it is longest, and bring it to-morrow to his forlorn widow,

"'LOUISA HAWKE.'

"From the moment they read that note, the magistrates felt it an outrage to suspect her. I do not myself mean to implicate her in the great guilt—far from it—but here was a bid for sympathy, and put forward in all the coolness of a deliberate plan; for the policeman himself told me, years after, that she saw him at Dover, and gave him a sovereign, saying, jocularly, 'I think you look better when dressed as a countryman.' Now, I call this consummate calculation."

As he was speaking, Quackinboss had drawn near the candles, and was examining the writing.

"I wonder," said he, "what the fellows who affect to decipher character in handwriting would say to this? It's all regular and well formed."

"Is it very small? Are the letters minute? for that, they allege, is one of the indications of a cruel nature," said Alfred. "They show a specimen of Lucrezia Borgia's, that almost requires a microscope to read it."

"No," said Quackinboss; "that's what they call a bold, free hand; the writing, one would say, of a slapdash gal that wasn't a-goin' to count consequences."

"Let *me* interpret her," said Alfred, drawing the candles towards him, and preparing for a very solemn and deliberate judgment. "What's this?" cried he, almost wildly. "I know this hand well; I could swear to it. You shall see if I cannot." And, without another word, he arose, and rushed from the room. Before the Doctor or Quackinboss could recover from their astonishment, Alfred was back again, holding two notes in his hand. "Come here, both of you, now," cried he, "and tell me, are not these in the same writing?" They were several short notes—invitations or messages from Marlia about riding-parties, signed Louisa Morris. "What do you say to that? Is that word 'Louisa' written by the same hand or not?" cried Alfred, trembling from head to foot as he spoke.

"'Tarnal snakes if it ain't!" broke out Quackinboss; "and our widow woman was the wife of that murdered fellow Hawke."

"And Clara his daughter!" muttered Alfred, as he covered his face with his hands to hide his emotion.

"These were written by the same person, that's clear enough," said the Doctor, closely scrutinizing every word and every letter; "there are marks of identity that cannot be disputed. But who is this widow you speak of?"

Alfred could only stammer out, "He'll tell you all," as he pointed to Quackinboss, for a faintish sick sensation crept over his frame, and he shook like one in the cold stage of an ague. The American, however, gave a very calm and connected narrative of their first meeting with Mrs. Penthony Morris and her supposed daughter at Lucca; how that lady, from a chance acquaintance with the Heathcotes, had established an intimacy, and then a friendship there.

"Describe her to me—tell me something of her appearance," burst in the old man with impatience, for as his mind followed the long-sought-for "trail," his eagerness became beyond his power of control. "Blue eyes, that might be mistaken for black, or dark hazel, had she not? and the longest of eyelashes, the mouth full and pouting, but the chin sharply turned, and firm-looking? Am I right?"

"That are you, and teeth as reg'lar as a row of soldiers."

"Her foot, too, was perfect. It had been modelled scores of times by sculptors, and there were casts of it with a Roman sandal, or naked on a plantain-leaf, in her drawing-room. You've seen her foot?"

"It was a grand foot! I *have* seen it," said the American; "and if I was one as liked monarchy, I'd say it might have done for a queen to stand on in front of a throne."

"What was her voice like?" asked the old man, eagerly.

"Low and soft, with almost a tremor in it when she asked some trifling favour," said Alfred, now speaking for the first time.

"Herself—her very self. I know her well, by *that!*" cried the old man, triumphantly. "I carried those trembling accents in my memory for many and many a day. Go on, and tell me more of her. Who was this same Morris—when, how, and where were they married?"

"We never knew; none of us ever saw him. Some said he was living, and in China or India. Some called her a widow. The girl Clara was called hers——"

"No. Clara was Hawke's. She must have been Hawke's daughter by his first wife, the niece of this Winthrop."

"She's the great heiress, then," broke in Quackinboss; "she's to have Peddar's Clearin's, and the whole of that track

beside Grove's River. There ain't such another fortune in all Ohio."

"And this was poor Clara's secret," said Alfred to Quackinboss, in a whisper, "when she said, 'I only know that I am an orphan, and that my name is not Clara Morris.'"

"Do *you* think, then, sir, that such a rogue as that fellow Trover went out all the way to the Western states to make out that gal's right to these territories?" asked Quackinboss, gravely.

"Not a bit of it. He went to rob her, to cheat her, to put forward some false claim, to substitute some other in her place," cried old Layton. "Who is to say if he himself be not the man Morris, and the husband of our fair friend? He may have fifty names, for aught we know, and Morris be one of them."

"You told me that Clara had been made over to a certain Mr. Stocmar, to prepare her for the stage," said Alfred to the American. But before he could reply the Doctor broke in,—

"Stocmar—Hyman Stocmar, of the Regent's?"

"The same. Do you know him, father?"

"That do I, and well, too. What of him?"

"It was to his care this young lady was entrusted," said Alfred, blushing at the very thought of alluding to her."

"If there should be dealings with Stocmar, let them be left to *me*," said the Doctor, firmly. "I will be able to make better terms with him than either of you."

"I s'pose you're not going to leave a gal that's to have a matter of a million of dollars to be a stage player? She ain't need to rant, and screech, and tear herself to pieces at ten or fifteen dollars a night and a free benefit."

"First to find her, then to assert her rights," said the Doctor.

"How *are* we to find her?" asked Alfred.

"I will charge myself with that task, but we must be active, too," said the Doctor. "I half suspect that I see the whole intrigue: why this woman was separated from the young girl, why this fellow Trover was sent across the Atlantic, and what means that story of the large fortune so suddenly left to Winthrop."

"I only know him slightly, sir," said Quackinboss, breaking in, "but no man shall say a word against Harvey P. Winthrop in my hearing."

"You mistake me," rejoined the Doctor. "It would be no impugnment of my honesty that some one bequeathed me an estate—not that I think the event a likely one. So far as I

can surmise, Winthrop is the only man of honour amongst them."

"Glad to hear you say so, sir," said the Colonel, gravely. "It's a great victory over national prejudices when a Britisher gets to say so much for one of our people. It's the grand compensation you always have for your inferiority, to call our sharpness roguery."

It was a critical moment now, and it needed all Alfred's readiness and address to separate two combatants so eager for battle. He succeeded, however, and, after some commonplace conversation, contrived to carry his father away, on pretence of an engagement.

"You should have let *me* smash him," muttered the old man, bitterly, as he followed him from the room. "You should have given me fifteen minutes—ay, ten. I'd not have asked more than ten to present him with a finished picture of his model Republican, in dress, manner, morals, and demeanour. I'd have said, 'Here is what I myself have seen——'"

"And I would have stopped you," broke in Alfred, boldly, "and laid my hand on Quackinboss's shoulder, and said, 'Here is what I have known of America. Here is one who, without other tie than a generous pity, nursed me through the contagion of a fever, and made recovery a blessing to me by his friendship after—who shared heart and fortune with me when I was a beggar in both.'"

"You are right, boy—you are right. How hard it is to crush the old rebellious spirit in one's nature, even after we have lived to see the evil it has worked us."

CHAPTER LV

THE MANAGER'S ROOM AT THE "REGENT'S."

At an early hour the next morning the two Laytons presented themselves at the private door of the "Regent's." Mr. Stocmar had returned that morning from Paris; he had been to bed for an hour, and was now dressed and up, but so busily engaged that he had left positive orders to be denied to all except to a certain high personage in the royal household, and a noble Lord, whose name he had given to the porter.

"We are not either of these," said the Doctor, smiling, "but I am a very old friend, whom he did not know was in England. I have been scores of times here with him; and to prove how I know my way through flats and side-scenes, I'll just step up to his room without asking you to conduct me." These pleadings were assisted considerably by the dexterous insinuation of a sovereign into the man's hand, and Layton passed in, with his son after him.

True to his word, and not a little to Alfred's astonishment, the Doctor threaded his way through many a dark passage and up many a frail stair, till he reached the well-known, well-remembered door. He knocked sharply, but without waiting for reply, turned the handle and entered. Stocmar, who stood at the table busily breaking the seals of a vast heap of letters, turned suddenly around and stared at the strangers with mingled surprise and displeasure.

"I gave positive orders that I could not receive strangers," said he, haughtily. "May I ask what is the meaning of this intrusion?"

"You shall know in a few moments, sir," said the old man, deliberately taking a seat, and motioning to his son to do the same. "My business could be transacted with yourself alone, and it would be useless referring me to a secretary or a treasurer. I have come here with my son——"

"Oh, the old story," broke in Stocmar. "The young gentleman is stage-struck; fancies that his Hamlet is better than Kean's or Macready's; but I have no time for this sort of thing. The golden age of prodigies is gone by, and, at

all events, I have no faith in it. Make an apothecary of him, clerk in a gas-works, or anything you please, only don't come here to bother me, you understand; my time is too full for these negotiations."

"Have you done?" said the old man, fiercely.

"Done with *you*, certainly," said Stocmar, moving towards the bell.

"That you have not. You have not even begun with me yet. I perceive you do not remember me."

"Remember you! I never saw you before, and I trust most sincerely I may never have that pleasure again. Anything wrong with the old party here?" whispered he as he turned to Alfred, and touched his finger significantly to his forehead.

"Be quiet, boy," cried Layton, fiercely, as his son started up to resent the insolence; "he shall soon learn whether there be or not. Our time, sir, if not so profitable as yours, has its value for ourselves, so that I will briefly tell you what I came for. I want the addresses of two persons of your acquaintance."

"This is beyond endurance. Am I to be the victim of every twaddling old bore that requires an address? Are you aware, sir, that I don't keep an agency office?"

With a calm self-possession which amazed his son, the old man quietly said, "I want this address—and this." And he handed Stocmar a card with two names written in pencil.

"'Clara Hawke'—and who is Clara Hawke? I never heard of her till now; and 'Mrs. Hawke,' too? My good friend, this is some self-delusion of yours. Take him away quietly, young gentleman, or my patience will not stand this any longer. I'll send for a policeman."

"There is one already in waiting, sir," said old Layton, fiercely, "and with a warrant for the apprehension of Mr. Hyman Stocmar. Ay, sir, our laws give many a wide margin to rascality, but slave-dealing is not legalized on our soil. Keep your laughter for the end, and see whether it will be so mirthful. Of that crime I mean to accuse you in an open court, the victim being myself. So, then, I have refreshed your memory a little; you begin to recognize me now. Ay, sir, it is the professor, your old slave, stands before you, whom, after having starved and cheated, you put drunk on board a sailing ship, and packed off to America; sold, too, deliberately sold, for a sum of money. Every detail of this transaction is known to me, and shall

be attested by competent witnesses. My memory is a better one than you suspect. I forget nothing, even to the day and the hour I last stood in this room. Yes," cried he, turning to his son and addressing him, "I was summoned here to be exhibited as a spectacle to a visitor, and who, think you, was the distinguished friend to whose scrutiny I was to be subjected? He was one who himself had enjoyed his share of such homage—he was no less a man than the famous Paul Hunt, tried at Jersey for the murder of Godfrey Hawke, and how acquitted the world well knows; and he it was who sat here, the dear friend of the immaculate Mr. Stocmar—Mr. Stocmar, the chosen associate of lords and ladies, the favoured guest of half the great houses in London. Oh, what a scandal and a disgrace is here! You'd rather face the other charge, with all its consequences, than this one. Where is your laughter now, Stocmar? Where that jocose humour you indulged in ten minutes ago?"

"Look here, my good friend," cried Stocmar, suddenly starting up from his chair, while the great drops of sweat hung on his forehead and trickled along his pale cheeks; "don't fancy that you can pit yourself against *me* before the public. I have station, friends, and patrons in the highest ranks in England."

"My name of Herbert Layton will suffice for all that I shall ask of it. When the true history of our connection shall be written and laid before the world, we shall see which of us comes best out of the ordeal."

"This, then, is a vengeance!" said Stocmar, trembling from head to foot.

"Not if you do not drive me to it. There never were easier terms to escape a heavy penalty. Give me the address of these persons."

"But I know nothing of them. I have not, amongst my whole acquaintance, one named Hawke."

The old man made no reply, and looked puzzled and confused. Stocmar saw his advantage, and hastily added,—

"I am ready to pledge you my oath to this."

"Ask him, then, for the address of Mrs. Penthony Morris, father, and of the young lady her reputed daughter," interposed Alfred.

"Ay, what say you to this?"

"What I say is, that I am not here to be questioned as to the whereabouts of every real or imaginary name you can think of."

"Restive again, Stocmar? What, are you so bent on

your own ruin, that you will exhaust the patience of one who never could boast too much of that quality? I tell you that if I leave this room without a full and explicit answer to my demand—and in writing, too, in your own hand—you'll not see me again except as your prosecutor in a court of justice. And now, for the last time, where is this woman?"

"She was in Italy; at Rome all the winter," said Stocmar, doggedly.

"I know that. And now?"

"In Germany, I believe."

"That is, you *know*, and the place too. Write it there."

"Before I do so, you'll give me, under your own hand, a formal release from this trumpery charge, whose worst consequence would be my appearing in public to answer it."

"Nothing of the kind: not a line to that effect. I'll keep it over you till the whole of the business we are engaged in be completed. Ay, sir, you shall not be exposed to the evil temptation to turn upon me. We have affairs to settle which will require our meeting with this woman, and as we live in an age of telegraphs, you shall not be able to warn her that we are coming; for if you do, I swear to you more solemnly than you swore a while back to me, that I'll bring such disgrace upon your head that you'll walk the streets of this city as wretched an object as *I* was when I slept in that dog-hole behind the fire-engine."

"You'll do nothing with me by your threats, old man."

"Everything, all I ask, by what my threats can accomplish. Remember, besides, all that we require of you will only serve to shorten a road that we are determined to go. You can only help us so far. The rest lies with ourselves."

"Her address is Gebhardts-Berg, Bregenz," said Stocmar, in a low muttering voice.

"Write it, sir; write it there," said the Doctor, pointing to a sheet of paper on the table.

"There, is that enough?" said Stocmar, as he wrote the words, and flung down the pen.

"No, there is yet the other. Where is Clara Hawke?"

"As to her, I may as well tell you she is bound to me by an indenture; I have been at the charge of her instruction, and can only be repaid by her successes hereafter——"

"More of the slave market!" broke in the Doctor. "But to the question. Who sold her to you? She had neither father nor mother. With whom did you make your compact? Bethink you these are points you'll have to answer

very openly, and with reporters for the daily press amongst the company who listen to you. Such treaties being made public may lead to many an awkward disclosure. It were wiser not to provoke them."

"I do not see why I am to incur a positive loss of money——"

"Only for this reason, that as you thought proper to buy without a title, you may relinquish without compensation. But come, we will deal with you better than you deserve. If it be, as I believe, this young lady's lot to inherit a large fortune, I will do my utmost to induce her to repay you all that you have incurred in her behalf. Will that satisfy you?"

"It might, if I were not equally certain that you have not the slightest grounds for the expectation. I know enough of her story to be aware that there is not one from whom she expects a shilling."

"Every day and hour brings us great surprises; nothing was less looked for by the great Mr. Stocmar this morning than a visit from *me*, and yet it has come to pass."

"And in whose interest, may I ask, are you taking all this trouble?—how is it incumbent on you to mix yourself up in questions of a family to which you do not belong, nor are even known to?"

"If I can only fashion to myself a pretext for your question, I would answer it; but to the matter—write the address there." And he pointed to the paper.

Stocmar obeyed, and wrote, "The Conservatoire, at Milan."

"I may warn you," added he, "that Mademoiselle Clara Stocmar, for as such is she inscribed, will not be given up to you, or to any one save myself, or by my order."

"I am aware of that, and therefore you will write this order. Mr. Stocmar, you need not be told by me that the fact of this girl being an English subject once admitted, the law of this country will take little heed of the regulations of a musical academy; save yourself this publicity, and write as I tell you."

Stocmar wrote some hurried lines and signed them. "Will that do?"

"Perfectly," said he, folding up both papers, and placing them in his pocket. "Now, Mr. Stocmar, thus far has been all business between us. You have done me a small service, and for it I am willing to forgive a great wrong; still, it is a fair bargain. Let us see, however, if we cannot

carry our dealings a little further. Here is a case where a dreadful scandal will be unburied, and one of the most fearful crimes be brought again before public notice, to herald the narrative of an infamous fraud. I am far from suspecting or insinuating that you have had any great part whatever in these transactions, but I know that when once they have become town talk, Hyman Stocmar will figure as a prominent name throughout. He will not appear as a murderer or a forger, it is true, but he will stand forward the intimate friend of the worst characters in the piece, and have always some small petty share of complicity to answer for. Is it not worth while to escape such an open exposure as this? What man—least of all, what man moving where you do—could court such scandal?"

Stocmar made no answer, but, leaning his head on his hand, seemed lost in thought.

"I can show you how to avoid it all. I will point out the way to escape from the whole difficulty."

"How do you mean?" cried Stocmar, suddenly.

"Leave the knaves and come over to the honest men—or desert the losing side and back the winner, if you like that better. In plain English, tell me all you know of this case, and of every one concerned in it. Give me your honest version of the scheme—how it has been done and by whom. You know Trover and Hunt well; say what were their separate shares. I will not betray your confidence; and if I can, I will reward it."

"Let your son leave us. I will speak to you alone," said Stocmar, in a faint whisper.

Alfred, at a signal from his father, stepped quietly away, and they were alone.

It was late in the afternoon when the Doctor arose to take his departure, and, though somewhat wearied, his look was elated, and his face glowed with an expression of haughty satisfaction, such as it might have worn after a collegiate triumph years and years ago.

CHAPTER LVI.

MR. O'SHEA AT BADEN.

Although Mr. O'Shea be not one of the most foreground figures in this piece, we are obliged to follow his fortunes for a brief space, and at a moment when our interests would more naturally call us in another direction. Thus, at a dinner-party, will it occasionally happen that our attention is engaged on one side, while our sympathies incline to the other: so, in life, the self-same incident continues to occur.

We have said that he had many a sore misgiving about the enterprise he was engaged in. He felt that he was walking completely in the dark, and towards what he knew not. Mrs. Morris was, doubtless, a clever pilot, but she *might* mistake the course, she *might* go wrong in her soundings, and, lastly, she *might* chance to be on the shore when the ship was scuttled. These were dire mistrusts, not to say very ungallant suspicions, to haunt the heart and the head of a bridegroom; but, alas! that we must own it, Mr. O'Shea now occupied that equatorial position in life equally distant from the zones of youth and age, where men are most worldly, and disposed to take the most practical views of whatever touches their interests. It was very hard for him to believe that a woman of such consummate cleverness as the widow had ever written a line that could compromise her. He took a man's view of the question, and fancied that a cool head is always cool, and a calculating heart always alive to its arithmetic. These letters, therefore, most probably referred to money transactions; they were, in fact, either bills, or securities, or promises to pay, under circumstances, possibly, not the pleasantest to make public. In such affairs he had always deemed a compromise the best course; why had she not given him a clearer insight into his mission? In fact, he was sailing with sealed orders, to be opened only on reaching a certain latitude. "At all events, I can do nothing till she writes to me;" and with this grain of comfort he solaced himself as he went along his road, trying to feel at ease, and doing his utmost to persuade him-

self that he was a lucky fellow, and "on the best thing" that had ever turned up in his life.

It is unpleasant for us to make the confession, but in his heart of hearts Mr. O'Shea thought of a mode of guiding himself through his difficulties which assuredly was little in keeping with the ardour of a devoted lover. The ex-Member for Inch was a disciple of that sect—not a very narrow one—which firmly believes that men have a sort of masonic understanding amongst them always to be true to each other against a woman, and that out of a tacit compact of mutual protection they will always stand by each other against the common enemy. If, therefore, he could make Paten's acquaintance, be intimate with him, and on terms of confidence, he might learn all the bearings of this case, and very probably get no inconsiderable insight into the fair widow's life and belongings.

Amidst a vast conflict of such thoughts as these he rolled along over the Splugen Alps, down the Via Mala, and arrived at last at Baden. The season was at its full flood. There were a brace of Kings there, and a whole covey of Serene Highnesses, not to speak of flocks of fashionables from every land of Europe. There was plenty of gossip: the gossip of politics, of play, of private scandal. The well-dressed world was amusing itself at the top of its bent, and every one speaking ill of his neighbour to his own heart's content. Whatever, however, may be the grand event of Europe—the outbreak of a war, or a revolution, the dethronement of a king, or the murder of an emperor—at such places as these the smallest incident of local origin will far out-top it in interest; and so, although the world at this moment had a very fair share of momentous questions at issue, Baden had only tongues and ears for one, and that was the lucky dog that went on breaking the bank at rouge-et-noir about twice a week.

Ludlow Paten was the man of the day. Now, it was his equipage, his horses; now, it was the company he entertained at dinner yesterday, the fabulous sum he had given for a diamond ring, the incredible offer he had made for a ducal palace on the Rhine. Around these and such-like narratives there floated a sort of atmosphere of an imaginative order: how he had made an immense wager to win a certain sum by a certain day, and now only wanted some trifle of ten or twelve thousand pounds to complete it; how, if he continued to break the bank so many times more, M. Bennasset, the proprietor, was to give him fifty thousand francs a year for

life to buy him off, with twenty other variations on these themes as to the future application of the money, some averring it was to ransom his wife from the Moors, and others, as positively, to pay off a sum with which he had absconded in his youth from a great banking-house in London; and, last of all, a select few had revived the old diabolic contract on his behalf, and were firm in declaring that after he retired to his room at night he was heard for hours counting over his gains, and disputing with the Evil One, who always came for his share of the booty, and rigidly insisted on having it in gold. Now, it was strange enough that these last, however wild the superstructure of their belief, had really a small circumstance in their favour, which was, that Paten had been met with three or four times in most unfrequented places, walking with a man of very wretched appearance and most forbidding aspect, who covered his face when looked at, and was only to be caught sight of by stealth. The familiar, as he was now called, had been seen by so many, that all doubt as to his existence was quite removed.

These were the stories which met O'Shea on his arrival, and which formed the table-talk of the hotel he dined in; narratives, of course, graced with all the illustrative powers of those who told them. One fact, however, impressed itself strongly on his mind—that with a man so overwhelmed by the favours of Fortune, any chance of forming acquaintance casually was out of the question. If he were cleaned out of his last Napoleon, one could know him readily enough; but to the fellow who can break the bank at will, archdukes and princes are the only intimates. His first care was to learn his appearance. Nor had he long to wait: the vacant chair beside the croupier marked the place reserved for the great player, whose game alone occupied the attention of the bystanders, and whose gains and losses were all marked and recorded by an expectant public. "Here he comes! That is he, leaning on the Prince of Tours, the man with the large beard!" whispered a person in O'Shea's hearing; and now a full, large man, over-weighty, as it seemed, for his years, pushed the crowd carelessly aside, and seated himself at the table. The low murmur that went round showed that the great event of the evening was about to "come off," and that the terrible conflict of Luck against Luck was now to be fought out.

More intent upon regarding the man himself than caring to observe his game, O'Shea stationed himself in a position to watch his features, scan their whole expression, and mark

every varying change impressed upon them. His experience of the world had made him a tolerable physiognomist, and he read the man before him reasonably well. "He is not a clever fellow," thought he, "he is only a resolute one; and, even as such, not persistent. Still, he will be very hard to deal with: he distrusts every man." Just as O'Shea was thus summing up to himself, an exclamation from the crowd startled him. The stranger had lost an immense "coup;" the accumulation of five successful passes had been swept away at once, and several minutes were occupied in counting the enormous pile of Napoleons he had pushed across the table.

The player sat apparently unmoved: his face, so far as beard and moustache permitted it to be seen, was calm and impassive; but O'Shea remarked a fidgety uneasiness in his hands, and a fevered impatience in the way he continued to draw off and on a ring which he wore on his finger. The game began again, but he did not bet, and murmuring comments around the room went on, some averring that he was a bad loser, who never had nerve for his reverses, and others as stoutly maintaining that he was such a consummate master of himself that he was never carried away by impulse, but seeing fortune unfavourable, had firmness enough to endure his present defeat, and wait for a better moment. Gradually the interest of the bystanders took some other direction, and Paten was unobserved, as he sat, to all seeming, inattentive to everything that went on before him. Suddenly, however, he placed twenty thousand francs in notes upon the table, and said, "Red." The "Black" won; and he pushed back his chair, arose, and strolled carelessly into another room.

O'Shea followed him: he saw him chatting away pleasantly with some of his most illustrious friends, laughingly telling how unfortunate he had been, and in sportive vein declaring that, from the very fact of her sex, a man should not trust too much to Fortune. "I'll go and play dominoes with the Archduchess of Lindau," said he, laughing; "it will be a cheap pleasure even if I lose." And he moved off towards a smaller *salon*, where the more exclusive of the guests were accustomed to assemble.

Not caring to attract attention by appearing in a company where he was not known to any, O'Shea sauntered out into the garden, and, tempted by the fresh night air, sat down. Chilled after a while, he resolved to take a brisk walk before bed-time, and set out in the avenue which leads to Lichtenthal. He had plenty to think of, and the time favoured re-

flection. On and on he went at a smart pace, the activity of mind suggesting activity of body, and, before he knew it, had strolled some miles from Baden, and found himself on the rise of the steep ascent that leads to Eberstein. He was roused, indeed, from his musings by the passage of a one-horse carriage quite close to him, and which, having gained a piece of level ground, drew up. The door was quickly opened, and a man got out; the moonlight was full upon his figure, and O'Shea saw it was Paten. He looked around for a second or two, and then entered the wood. O'Shea determined to explore the meaning of the mystery, and crossing the low edge, at once followed him. Guided by the light of the cigar which Paten was smoking, O'Shea tracked him till he perceived him to come to a halt, and immediately after heard the sound of voices. The tone was angry and imperious on both sides, and, in intense eagerness, O'Shea drew nigher and nigher.

"None of your nonsense with me," said a firm and resolute voice. "I know well how much you believe of such trumpery."

"I tell you again that I do believe it. As certain as I give you money, so certain am I to lose. Thursday week I gave you five Naps, I lost that same night seventy thousand francs; on Wednesday last the same thing; and to-night two thousand Napoleons are gone. You swore to me, besides, so late as yesterday, that if I gave you twenty Louis, you'd leave Baden, to go back to England."

"So I would, but I've lost it. I went in at roulette, and came out without sixpence; and I'm sure it was not lending brought bad luck upon *me*," added he, with a bitter laugh.

"Then may I be cursed in all I do, if I give you another fraction! You think to terrify me by exposure; but who'll stand that test best, the man who can draw on his banker for five thousand pounds, or the outcast who can't pay for his dinner? Let the world know the worst of me, and say the worst of me, I can live without it, and you may die on a dunghill."

"Well, I'm glad we're come to this at last. Baden shall know to-morrow morning the whole story, and you will see how many will sit down at the same table with you. You're a fool—you always were a fool—to insult a man as reckless as I am. What have I to lose? They can't try *me* over again any more than *you*. But you can be shunned and cut by your fine acquaintances, turned out of clubs, disowned on every hand——"

"Look here, Collier," broke in Paten; "I have heard all

that rubbish fifty times from you, but it doesn't terrify me. The man that can live as I do need never want friends or acquaintances; the starving beggar it is who has no companionship. Let us start fair to-morrow, as you threaten, and at the end of the week let us square accounts, and see who has the best of it."

"I'll go into the rooms when they are most crowded, and I'll say, 'The man yonder, who calls himself Ludlow Paten is Paul Hunt, the accomplice of Towers, that was hanged for the murder of Godfrey Hawke, at Jersey. My name is Collier; I never changed it; I, too, was in the dock on that day. Here we stand, he in fine clothes, and I in rags, but not so very remote as externals bespeak us."

"In two hours after I'd have you sent over the frontier with a gendarme, as a vagabond, and without means of support, and I'd be travelling post to Italy."

"To see the widow, I hope; to prosecute the wretched woman who once in her life thought you were not a scoundrel."

"Ay, and marry her too, my respected friend, if the intelligence can give you pleasure to hear it. I'm sorry we can't ask you to the wedding."

"No, that you'll not; she knows you, and while you cheated every one of *us*, ***she*** discovered you to be the mean fellow you are; ready, as she said, to have a share in every enterprise, provided you were always spared the peril. Do you recognize the portrait there, Paul Hunt, and can you guess the painter?"

"If she ever made the speech she'll live to rue it."

"Not a bit of it, man. That woman is your master. You did your very best to terrify her, but you never succeeded. She dares you openly; and if I have to make the journey on foot, I'll seek her out in Italy, and say, 'Here is one who has the same hate in his heart that you have, and has less hold on life; help him to our common object. It's not a cool head will be wanting in such a moment; so, look out ahead, Master Paul."

"You hint at a game that two can play at."

"Ay, but you're not one of them. You were always a coward."

A savage oath, and something like the noise of a struggle, followed. Neither spoke; but now O'Shea could distinctly mark, by the crashing of the brushwood, that they had either both fallen to the ground, or that one had got the other under. Before he could resolve what course to take, the sharp report of a pistol rung out, the hasty rustle of a man forcing through

the trees followed, and then all was still. It was not till after some minutes that he determined to go forward. A few steps brought him to the place, where in a little alley of the wood lay a man upon his face. He felt his wrist, and then, turning him on his back, laid his hand on the heart. All was still; he was warm, as if in life, but life had fled for ever! A faint streak of moonlight had now just fallen upon the spot, and he saw it was Ludlow Paten who lay there. The ball had entered his left side, and probably pierced the heart, so instantaneous had been his death. While O'Shea was thus engaged in tracing the fatal wound, a heavy pocket-book fell from the breast-pocket. He opened it; its contents were a packet of letters, tied with a string; he could but see that they bore the address of Paul Hunt, but he divined the rest. They were *hers*. The great prize, for which he himself was ready to risk life, was now his own, and he hastened away from the place, and turned with all speed towards Baden.

It was not yet daybreak when he got back, and, gaining his room, locked the door. He knew not why he did so, but in the fear and turmoil of his mind he dreaded the possibility of seeing or being seen. He feared, besides, lest some chance word might escape him, some vague phrase might betray him as the witness of a scene he resolved never to disclose. Sometimes, indeed, as he sat there, he would doubt the whole incident, and question whether it had not been the phantasm of an excited brain; but there before him on the table lay the letters; there they were, the terrible evidences of the late crime, and perhaps the proofs of guilt in another too!

This latter thought nearly drove him distracted. There before him lay what secured to him the prize he sought for, and yet what, for aught he knew, might contain what would render that object a shame and a disgrace. It lay with himself to know this. Once in her possession, he, of course, could never know the contents, or if by chance discovery came, it might come too late. He reasoned long and anxiously with himself; he tried to satisfy his mind that there were cases in which self-preservation absolved a man from what in less critical emergencies had been ignominious to do. He asked himself, "Would not a man willingly burn the documents whose production would bring him to disgrace and ruin? and, by the same rule, would not one eagerly explore those which might save him from an irreparable false step? At all events," thought he, "Fortune has thrown the chance in my way, and so——" He read them.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE COTTAGE NEAR BREGENZ.

There was something actually artistic in the choice old Holmes had made for his daughter's residence near Bregenz. It was an old-fashioned farm-house, with a deep eave, and a massive cornice beneath it. A wooden gallery ran the entire length, with a straggling stair to it, overgrown with a very ancient fig-tree, whose privilege it was to interweave through the balustrades, and even cross the steps at will, the whole nearly hidden by the fine old chestnut-trees which clothe the Gebhardts-Berg to its very summit. It was the sort of spot a lone and sorrowing spirit might have sought out to weep away unseen, to commune with grief in solitude, and know nothing of a world she was no more to share in. The simple-hearted peasants who accepted them as lodgers asked no reason for their selection of the place, nor were they likely, in their strange dialect, to be able to discuss the point with others, save their neighbours. The chief room, which had three windows opening on a little terrace, looked out upon a glorious panorama of the Swiss Alps, with the massive mountains that lead to the Splugen, and it was at one of these Mrs. Morris—or rather, to give her that name by which for the last few pages of our story she may be called, Mrs. Hawke—now sat, as the sun was sinking, watching with an unfeigned enjoyment the last gorgeous tints of declining day upon the snow peaks.

Perhaps at that moment the sense of repose was the most grateful of all sensations to her, for she had passed through a long day of excitement and fatigue. Like a great actress who had, in her impersonation of a difficult part, called forth all her powers of voice, look, and gesture, straining every fibre to develop to the utmost the passion she would convey, and tearing her very heart to show its agony, she was now to feel the terrible depression of reaction, the dreary void of the solitude around her, and the death-like stillness of her own subdued emotions. But yet, through all this, there was a rapturous enjoyment in the thought of a task accomplished, an ordeal passed.

On that same morning it was Trover had arrived with Mr.

Winthrop, and her first meeting took place with the friend of her late husband—perhaps the one living being whom alone of all the world she felt a sort of terror at seeing. The fear he inspired was vague, and not altogether reasonable; but it was there, and she could not master it. Till she met him, indeed, it almost overcame her, but when she found him a mild old man, of gentle manners and a quiet presence, unsuspecting and frank, and extending towards her a compassionate protection, she rallied quickly from her fears, and played out her part courageously.

How affecting was her grief! It was one of those touching pictures which, while they thrill the heart, never harrow the feelings. It was sorrow made beautiful, rather than distressing. Time, of course, long years, had dulled the bitterness of her woe, and only cast the sombre colouring of sadness over a nature that might have been—who knows?—made for joy and brightness. Unused to such scenes, the honest American could only sit in a sort of admiring pity of such a victim to an early sorrow; so fair a creature robbed of her just meed of this world's happiness, and by a terrible destiny linked with an awful event! And how lovely she was through it all! how forgiving of that man's cruelty. He knew Hawke well, and he was no stranger to the trials a woman must have gone through who had been chained to his coarse and brutal nature; and yet not a harsh word fell from her, not a syllable of reproach or blame. No; she had all manner of excuses to make for him, in the evil influences by which he was surrounded, the false and bad men who assumed to be his friends.

It was quite touching to hear her allude to the happiness of their early married life: their contentment with humble fortune, their willing estrangement from a world of luxury and display, to lead an existence of cultivated pursuits and mutual affection. Winthrop was moved as he listened, and Trover had to wipe his eyes.

Of the dreadful event of her life she skilfully avoided details, dwelling only on such parts of it as might illustrate her own good qualities, her devotion to the memory of one of whom she had much to pardon, and her unceasing affection for his child. If the episode of that girl's illness and death was only invented at the moment of telling, it lost nothing by the want of premeditation; and Winthrop's tears betrayed how he took to heart the desolate condition of that poor bereaved woman.

"I had resolved," said she, "never to avail myself of this fortune. To what end could I desire wealth? I was dead

to the world. If enough remained to support me through my lonely pilgrimage, I needed no more. The simple life of these peasants here offered me all that I could now care for, and it was in this obscure spot I meant to have ended my days, unnoticed and unwept. My dear father, however, a distinguished officer, whose services the Government is proud to acknowledge, had rashly involved himself in some speculations; everything went badly with him, and he finished by losing all that he had laid by to support his old age. In this emergency I bethought me of that will; but even yet I don't believe I should have availed myself of its provisions if it were not that my father urged me by another and irresistible argument, which was, that in not asserting my own claim, I was virtually denying yours. 'Think of Winthrop,' said he. 'Why should he be defrauded of his inheritance because you have taken a vow of poverty?' He called it a vow of poverty," said she, smiling through her tears, "since I wore no better dress than this, nor tasted any food more delicate than the rough fare of my peasant neighbours."

If the costume to which she thus directed their attention was simple, it was eminently becoming, being, in reality, a sort of theatrical travesty of a peasant's dress, made to fit perfectly, and admitting of a very generous view of her matchless foot and ankle—insomuch, indeed, that Mr. Winthrop could not help feeling that if poverty had its privations, it could yet be eminently picturesque.

If Winthrop wished from time to time to ask some question about this, or inquire into that, her answers invariably led him far afield, and made him even forget the matter he had been eager about. A burst of emotion—some suddenly recalled event—some long-forgotten passage brought back to mind in a moment, would extricate her from any difficulty; and as to dates—those awful sunk rocks of all unprepared fiction—how could she be asked for these—she, who really could not tell the very year they were then living in—had long ceased to count time or care for its onward course? There were things he did not understand—there were things, too, that he could not reconcile with each other—but he could not, at such a moment, suggest his doubts or his difficulties, nor be so heartless as to weary that poor crushed and wounded spirit by prolonging a scene so painful.

When he arose to take his leave they were like old friends. With a delicate tact all her own, she distinguished him especially from Mr. Trover; and while she gave Winthrop both

her hands in his, she bestowed upon his companion a very cold smile and a curtsey.

"Are they gone—positively gone?" asked she of her father, who now entered the room, after having carefully watched the whole interview from a summer-house with a spy-glass.

"Yes, dear; they are out on the road. I just overheard the American, as he closed the wicket, remark, 'She's the most fascinating creature I ever talked to!'"

"I hope I am, papa. When one has to be a serpent, one ought surely to have a snake's advantages! What a dear old creature that American is! I really have taken a great liking to him. There is a marvellous attraction in the man that one can deceive without an effort, and, like the sheep who come begging to be eaten, only implores to be 'taken in again.'"

"I never took my eyes off him, and I saw that you made him cry twice."

"Three times, papa—three times, not to speak of many false attacks of sensibility that went off in deep sighs and chokings. Oh dear! am I not wearied? Fetch me a little lemonade, and put one spoonful—only one—of maraschino in it. That wretch Trover almost made me laugh with his absurd display of grief. I'll not have him here to-morrow."

"And is Winthrop to come to-morrow?"

"Yes; and this evening too. He comes to-night to tea; he is so anxious to know you, papa; he has such a pleasant theory about that dear old man covered with wounds and honours, and devoting his declining years to console his poor afflicted child. You have put too much maraschino in this."

"One spoonful, on honour; but I mean to treat myself more generously. Well, I'm heartily glad that the interview is over. It was an anxious thing to have before one, and particularly not knowing what manner of man he might be."

"That was the real difficulty. It's very hard to 'play up' to an unknown audience!"

"I'd not have asked them back this evening, Loo. It will be too much for you."

"I did not do so. It was Winthrop himself begged permission to come, but he promised that not a syllable of business was to transpire, so that I have only to be very charming, which, of course, costs nothing."

"I gather that all went smoothly on this morning. No difficulty anywhere?"

"None whatever. The account Trover gave us is fully

borne out. The property is immense. There are, however, innumerable legal details to be gone through. I can't say what documents and papers we shall not have to produce; meanwhile, our American friend most generously lays his purse at our disposal, and this blank cheque is to be filled at my discretion."

"Barnet and King," read he; "an excellent house. 'Please to pay to Mrs. Hawke, or order.' Very handsome of him, this, Loo; very thoughtful."

"Very thoughtful; but I'd as soon Trover had not been present; he's a greedy, grabbing sort of creature, and will insist upon a large discount out of it."

"Make the draft the bigger, darling; the remedy is in your own hands."

"Strange there should be no letter from O'Shea. I was full certain we should have heard something before this."

"Perhaps we may by this post, dear. It ought to have arrived by this time."

"Then go and see, by all means. How I hate a post that comes of an evening! One ought to begin the day with one's letters; they are the evil fates, whose machinations all our efforts are directed against. They are, besides, the whispering of the storm that is brewing afar off, but is sure to overtake us. One ought to meet them with a well-rested brain and refreshed spirit, not wearied and jaded and unstrung by the day's toil."

And the Captain prepared to obey, but not without a variety of precautions against catching cold, which seemed somewhat to try his daughter's patience.

"You really," said she, with a half-bitter smile, "take very little account of the anxiety I must feel about my future husband."

"Nonsense, dear; the O'Shea is not to be thought of. It would really be a gross misuse of wealth to share it with such a man."

"So it might, if one were free to choose. But it's the old story, papa," said she, with a sigh. "To be cured of the ague, one is willing to take arsenic. There, you are surely muffled enough now; lose no more time, and above all things don't get into a gossiping mood, and stay to talk with Trover, or be seduced by Mr. Winthrop's juleps, but come back at once, for I have a sort of feverish foreboding over me that I cannot control."

"How silly that is, dear!—to have a stout heart on the high seas and grow cowardly in the harbour."

"But *are* we in the harbour? Are we so *very* certain that the voyage is over?" said she, with increased eagerness. "But pray go for the letters, or I will myself."

He set out at last, and she watched him as he shut the wicket and crossed out upon the high road; and then, all alone as she sat, she burst into a passionate flood of tears. Was this the relief of a nature strained like an over-bent bow? Was it the sorrowful outburst of a spirit which, however bold and defiant to the world, was craven to itself? or was it simply that fear had mastered her, and that she felt the approach of the storm that was to shipwreck her?

She must have been partly stunned by her sorrow, for she sat, no longer impatient, nor watching eagerly for his return, but in a sort of half-lethargic state, gazing out unconsciously into the falling night that now closed in fast around her.

It is neither a weak nor an ignorant theory that ascribes, even to the most corrupt natures, moments of deepest remorse, sincere and true, aspirations after better things, and a willingness to submit to the severest penalties of the past, if only there be a "future" in store for them. Who can tell us what of these were now passing through the mind of her who sat at that window, brooding sorrowfully?

"Here's a letter for you, Loo, and a weighty one, too," said Holmes, entering the room, and approaching her before she was aware. "It was charged half a dollar extra, for overweight. I trust you'll say it was worth the money."

"Fetch a light! get me a candle!" cried she, eagerly; and she broke the seal with hands all trembling and twitching. "And leave me, papa; leave me a moment to myself."

He placed the candles at her side, and stole away. She turned one glance at the address, "To Mrs. Hawke," and she read in that one word that the writer knew her story. But the contents soon banished other thoughts; they were her own long-coveted, long-sought letters; there they were now before her, time-worn and crumpled, records of a terrible season of sorrow, and misery, and guilt! She counted them over and over; there were twenty-seven, not one was missing. She did not dare to open them; and even in her happiness to regain them was the darkening shadow of the melancholy period when they were written—the long days of suffering and the nights of tears. So engrossed was she by the thought that they were now her own again, that the long tyranny of years had ended and the ever-impending shame departed, that she could not turn to learn how she came by them, nor through whom. At length this seemed

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to flash suddenly on her mind, and she examined the envelope, and found a small sealed note, addressed, as was the packet, "Mrs. Hawke." O'Shea's initials were in the corner. It contained but one line, which ran thus :—

"I have read the enclosed.—G. O'S."

Then was it that the bitterness of her lot smote her with all its force, and she dropped down upon her knees, and laying her head on the chair, sobbed as if each convulsive beat would have rent her very heart.

Oh, the ineffable misery of an exposed shame! the terrible sense that we are to meet abroad and before the world the stern condemnation our conscience has already pronounced, and that henceforth we are to be shunned and avoided! There is not left to us any longer one mood of mind that can bring repose. If we are depressed, it is in the mourning of our guilt we seem to be dressed; if for a moment we assume the air of light-heartedness, it is to shock the world by the want of feeling for our shame! It is written that we are to be outcasts, and live apart!

"May I come in, Loo?" said a low voice from the half-opened doorway. It was her father, asking for the third time before she heard him.

She uttered a faint "Yes," and tried to rise; but her strength failing, she laid her head down again between her hands.

"What is this, darling?" he said, stooping down over her. "What bad tidings have you got there? Tell me, Loo, for I may be able to lighten your sorrow for you."

"No," said she, calmly, "that you cannot, for you cannot make me unlive the past! Read that."

"Well, I see nothing very formidable in this, dear. I can't suppose that it is the loss of such a lover afflicts you. He has read them. Be it so. They are now in your own hands, and neither he nor any other will ever read them again. It would have been more interesting had he told us how he came by them; that was something really worth knowing, for remember, Loo—and it is, after all, the great point—these are documents you were ready and willing to have bought up at a thousand pounds, or even more. Paten often swore he'd have three thousand for them, and there they are now, safe in your own keeping, and not costing you one shilling. Stay," said he, laughing, "the postage was about one-and-sixpence."

"And is it nothing to cost me open shame and ignominy? Is it nothing, that, instead of one man, two now have read

the dark tracings of my degraded heart? Oh, father, even *you* might feel for the misery of exposure!"

"But it is not exposure: it is the very opposite; it is, of all things, the most secret and secure. When these letters are burned, what accusation remains against you? The memory of two loose men about town. But who'll believe them, or who cares if they be believed? Bethink you that every one in this world is maligned by somebody, and finds somebody else to credit the scandal. Give me a bishop to blacken to-morrow, and see if I won't have a public to adopt the libel. No, no, Loo; it's a small affliction, believe me, that one is able to dispose of with a lucifer-match. Here, girl, give them to me, and never waste another thought on them."

"No," said she, resolutely, "I'll not burn them. Whatever I may ask of the world to think of me, I do not mean to play the hypocrite to myself. Lend me your hand, and fetch me a glass of water. I cannot meet these people to-night. You must go over to the inn, and say that I am ill—call it a headache—and add, that I hope by to-morrow I shall be quite well again."

"Nay, nay, let them come, dear, and the very exertion will cheer you. You promised that American to sing him one of his nigger melodies—don't forget that."

"Go and tell them that I have been obliged to take to bed, father," said she in a hollow voice. "It is no falsehood to call me very ill."

"My dear Loo," said he, caressingly, "all this is so unlike yourself. *You*, that never lacked courage in your life! *you*, that never knew what it was to be faint-hearted!"

"Well, you see me a coward at last," said she, in a faint voice. "Go and do as I bade you, father, for this is no whim, believe me."

The old man muttered out some indistinct grumblings, and left the room on his errand.

She had not been many minutes alone when she heard the sharp sounds of feet on the gravel, and could mark the voices of persons speaking together with rapidity. One she quickly recognized as her father's, the other she soon knew to be Trover's. The last words he uttered as he reached the door were, "Arrested at once!"

"Who is to be arrested at once?" cried she, rushing wildly to the door.

"We, if we are caught!" said Holmes. "There's no time for explanation now. Get your traps together, and let us be off in quick time."

"It is good counsel he gives you," said Trover. "The game is up, and nothing but flight can save us. The great question is, which way to go."

She pressed her hands to her temples for a moment, and then, as if recalled, by the peril, to her old activity of thought and action, said,—

"Let Johann fetch his cousin quickly; they both row well, and the boat is ready at the foot of the garden. We can reach Rorschach in a couple of hours, and make our way over to St. Gall."

"And then?" asked Trover, peevishly.

"We are, at least, in a mountain region, where there are neither railroads nor telegraphs."

"She is right. Her plan is a good one, Trover," broke in Holmes. "Go fetch what things you mean to take with you, and come back at once. We shall be ready by that time."

"If there be danger, why go back at all?" said she. "Remember, I know nothing of the perils that you speak of, nor do I ask to know till we are on the road out of them. But stay here, and help us to get our pack made."

"Now you are yourself again! now I know you, Loo," said Holmes, in a tone of triumph.

In less than half an hour after they were skimming across the Lake of Constance as fast as a light skiff and strong arms could bear them. The night was still and calm though dark, and the water without a ripple.

For some time after they left the shore scarcely a word was spoken amongst them. At last Holmes whispered something in his daughter's ear, and she rejoined aloud,—

"Yes, it is time to tell me now; for, though I have submitted myself to your judgment in this hasty flight, I am not quite sure the peril was as imminent as you believed it. What did you mean by talking of an arrest? Who could arrest us? And for what?"

"You shall hear," said Trover; "and perhaps, when you have heard, you'll agree that I was not exaggerating our danger."

Not wishing to impose on our reader the minute details into which he entered, and the narrative of which lasted almost till they reached the middle of the lake, we shall give in a few words the substance of his story. While dressing for dinner at the inn, he saw a carriage with four posters arrive, and, in a very few minutes after, heard a loud voice inquiring for Mr. Harvey Winthrop. Suddenly struck by the strangeness of such a demand, he hastened to gain a

small room adjoining Winthrop's, and from which a door communicated, by standing close to which, he could overhear all that passed.

He had but reached the room and locked the door, when he heard the sounds of a hearty welcome and recognition exchanged within. The stranger spoke with an American accent, and very soon placed the question of his nationality beyond a doubt.

"You would not believe," said he, "that I have been in pursuit of you for a matter of more than three thousand miles. I went down to Norfolk and to St. Louis, and was in full chase into the Far West, when I found I was on the wrong tack; so I 'wore ship' and came over to Europe." After satisfying in some degree the astonishment this declaration excited, he went on to tell how he, through a chance acquaintance at first, and afterwards a close friendship with the Laytons, came to the knowledge of the story of the Jersey murder, and the bequest of the dying man on his daughter's behalf, his interest being all the more strongly engaged because every one of the localities was familiar to him, and his own brother a tenant on the very land. All the arts he had deployed to trace out the girl's claim, and all the efforts, with the aid of the Laytons, he had made to find out Winthrop himself, he patiently recounted, mentioning his accidental companionship with Trover, and the furtive mode in which that man had escaped him. It was, however, by that very flight Trover confirmed the suspicion he had attached to him, and so the stranger continued to show that from the hour of his escape they had never "lost the track." How they had crossed the Atlantic he next recorded—all their days spent in discussing the one theme—no other incident or event ever occupying a moment's attention. "We were certain of two things," said he: "there was a deep snare, and that girl was its victim." He confessed, that, if to himself the inquiry possessed a deep interest, with old Layton it had become a passion.

"At last," continued Trover, "he began to confess that their hopes fell, and each day's discomfiture served to chill the ardour that had sustained them, when a strange and most unlooked-for light broke in upon them by the discovery of a few lines of a note written by you to Dr. Layton himself years before, and, being produced, was at once recognized as the handwriting of Mrs. Penthony Morris."

"Written by *me!* How could I have written to him? I never heard of him," broke she in.

"Yes, he was the doctor who attended Hawke in his last illness, and it appeared you wrote to beg he would cut off a lock of hair for you, and bring it to you."

"I remember that," said she, in a hollow voice, "though I never remembered his name was Layton. And he has this note still?"

"You shall hear. No sooner had his son——"

"You cannot mean Alfred Layton?"

"Yes; the same. No sooner had he declared that he knew the hand, than they immediately traced you in Mrs. Penthony Morris, and knowing that Stocmar had become the girl's guardian, they lost no time in finding him out. I was too much flurried and terrified at this moment to collect clearly what followed, but I gathered that the elder Layton held over him some threat which, if pushed to execution, might ruin him. By means of this menace, they made Stocmar confess everything. He told who Clara was, how he had gained possession of her, under what name she went, and where she was then living. Through some influence which I cannot trace, they interested a secretary of state in their case, and started for the Continent with strong letters from the English authorities, and a detective officer specially engaged to communicate with the foreign officials, and permit, when the proofs might justify, of an arrest."

"How much do they know, then?" asked she, calmly.

"They know everything. They know of the forged will, the false certificate of death, and Winthrop has confirmed the knowledge. Fortunately, I have secured the more important document. I hastened to his room while they were yet talking, opened his desk, and carried away the will. As to the certificate, the Laytons and the detective had set off for Meisner the moment after reaching Bregenz to establish its forged character."

"Who cares for that?" said she, carelessly. "It is a trifling offence. Where is the other—the will?"

"I have it here," said he, pointing to his breast-pocket.

"Let us make a bonfire, then," said she, "for I, too, have some inconvenient records to get rid of. I thought of keeping them as memories, but I suspect I shall need no reminders."

While Trover tore the forged will in pieces, she did the like by the letters, and a match being applied to the fragments, the flames rose up, and in a few seconds the blackened remnants were carried away by the winds, and lost.

"So then, Mr. Trover," said she, at length, "Norfolk

Island has been defrauded of your society for this time. By the way, papa, is not this Doctor Layton your friend as well as mine?"

"Yes, Loo, he is the man of ozone and vulcanized zinc, and I don't know what else. I hoped he had died ere this."

"No, papa, they don't die. If you remark, you'll see that the people whose mission it is to torment are wonderfully long-lived, and if I were an assurance agent, I'd take far more account of men's tempers than their gout tendencies and dropsies. Was there any allusion to papa, Mr. Trover?"

"Yes; old Layton seems to have a warrant, or something of the kind, against him, on a grave charge, but I had no mind to hear what."

"So that, I suppose," said she, laughing, "I am the only 'innocent' in the company; for *you* know, Mr. Trover, that I forged nothing, falsified nothing; I was betrayed, by my natural simplicity of character, into believing that a fortune was left me. I never dreamed that Mr. Trover was a villain."

"I don't know how you take it so easily. We have escaped transportation, it is true, but we have not escaped public shame and exposure," said Trover, peevishly.

"She's right, though, Trover—she's right. One never gets in the true frame of mind to meet difficulties till one is able to laugh a little at them."

"Not to mention," added she, "that there is a ludicrous side in all troubles. I wonder how poor dear Mr. Winthrop bears his disappointment, worse than mine, in so far that he has travelled three thousand miles to attain it."

"Oh, he professes to be charmed. I heard him say, 'Well, Quackinboss, I'm better pleased to know that the poor girl is alive than to have a million of dollars left me.'"

"You don't say the stranger was Quackinboss, the dear Yankee we were all so fond of long ago at Marlia, and whom I never could make in love with me, though I did my very best? Oh, father, is it not provoking to think of all the old friends we are running away from? Colonel Quackinboss, Doctor Layton, and Alfred! every one of them so linked to us by one tender thought or another. What a charming little dinner we might have had to-morrow; the old Doctor would have taken me in, whispering a little doleful word, as we went, about the Hawke's Nest, and long ago; and you and he would have had your scientific talk afterwards!"

How old Holmes laughed at the pleasant conceit! It was really refreshing to see that good old man so cheery and light of heart; the very boat shook with his jollity.

"Listen! — do listen!" said Trover, in an accent of terror. "I'm certain I heard the sound of oars following us."

"Stop rowing for a moment," said she to the boatmen; and as the swift skiff glided noiselessly along, she bent down her head to listen. "Yes," said she, in a low, quiet voice, "Trover is right; there is a boat in pursuit, and they, too, have ceased pulling now, to trace us. Ha! there they go again, and for Lindau, too; they have heard, perhaps, the stroke of oars in that direction."

"Let our fellows pull manfully, then, and we are safe," cried Trover, eagerly.

"No, no," said she, in the same calm, collected tone. "The moon has set, and there will be perfect darkness till the day breaks, full two hours off. We must be still, so long as they are within hearing of us. I know well, Trover, what a tax this imposes on your courage, but it can't be helped."

"Just so, Trover," chimed in Holmes. "She commands here, and there must be no mutiny."

The wretched man groaned heavily, but uttered no word of reply.

"I wish that great chemical friend of yours, papa—the wonderful Doctor Layton—had turned his marvellous mind to the invention of invisible fire. I am dying for a cigar now, and I am afraid to light one."

"Don't think of it, for mercy's sake!" broke in Trover.

"Pray calm yourself, I have not the slightest fancy for being overtaken by this interesting party, nor do I think papa has either—not that our meeting could have any consequence beyond mere unpleasantness. If they should come up with us, I am as ready to denounce the deceitful Mr. Trover as any of them."

"This is very poor jesting, I must say," muttered he, angrily.

"You'll find it, perhaps, a very serious earnest if we're caught."

"Come, come, Loo, forgive him; he certainly meant all for the best. I'm sure you did, Trover," said old Holmes, with the blandest of voices.

"Why, what on earth do you mean?" cried he. "You are just as deep in the plot as I am. But for you, how should I have known about Hawke's having any property in America, or that he had any heir to it?"

"I am not naturally suspicious, Trover," said she, with

mock gravity, "but I declare I begin to believe you are a bad man—a very bad man!"

"I hope and trust not, Loo," said old Holmes, fervently; "I really hope not."

"It is no common baseness that seeks for its victim the widow and the fatherless. Please to put that rug under my feet, Trover. There are barristers would give their eye-tooth for such an opening for invective. I have one fat friend in my eye would take the brief for mere pleasure of blackguarding you. You know whom I mean, papa."

"You may push a joke too far, Mrs. Morris—or Mrs. Hawke, rather," said Trover, rudely, "for I don't know by which name you will be pleased to be known in future."

"I am thinking very seriously of taking a new one, Trover, and the gentleman who is to share it with me will probably answer all your inquiries on that and every other subject. I trust, too, that he will meet us to-morrow."

"Well, if I were Trover, I'd not pester him with questions," said Holmes, laughingly.

"Don't you think they might take to their oars again, now?" asked Trover, in a very beseeching tone.

"Poor Mr. Trover!" said she, with a little laugh. "It is really very hard on him! I have a notion that this night's pleasuring on the Lake of Constance will be one of the least grateful of his recollections." Then turning to the boatmen, she bade them "give way" with a will, and pull their best for Rorschach.

From this time out nothing was said aloud, but Holmes and his daughter spoke eagerly together in whispers, while Trover sat apart, his head turned towards where the shadow of large mountains indicated the shore of the lake.

"A'n't you happy now, Mr. Trover?" said she, at length, as the boat glided into a little cove, where a number of fishing-craft lay at anchor. "A'n't you happy?"

Either smarting under what he felt the sarcasm of her question, or too deeply immersed in his own thoughts, he made no reply whatever, but as the boat grated on the shingly beach he sprang out and gained the land. In another minute the boatmen had drawn the skiff high and dry, on the sand, and assisted the others to disembark.

"How forgetful you are of all gallant attentions," said she, as Trover stood looking on, and never offering any assistance whatever. "Have you got any silver in your purse, papa?"

"I can't see what these pieces are," said Holmes, trying to peer through the darkness.

"Pay these people, Trover," said she, "and be liberal with them. Remember from what fate they have saved you." And as she spoke she handed him her purse. "We'll saunter slowly up to the village, and you can follow us."

Trover called the men around him, and proceeded to settle their fare, while Holmes and his daughter proceeded at an easy pace inland.

"How much was there in your purse, Loo?" asked Holmes.

"Something under twenty Napoleons, papa; but it will be quite enough."

"Enough for what, dear?"

"Enough to tempt poor Mr. Trover. We shall never see more of him."

"Do you really think so?"

"I am certain of it. He was thinking of nothing else than how to make his escape all the time we were crossing the lake, and I, too, had no more pressing anxiety than how to get rid of him. Had I offered him a certain sum, we should have had him for a pensioner as long as he lived, but by making him steal the money I force him to be his own security that he'll never come back again. It was for this that I persisted in acting on his fears in the boat; the more wretched we made him the cheaper he became, and when he heaved that last heavy sigh, I took ten Napoleons off his price."

Holmes had to stop walking, and hold his hands to his sides with laughter. The device seemed to him about the best practical joke he had ever heard of. Then ceasing suddenly, he said,—

"But what if he were to go back to the others, Loo, and turn approver against us?"

"We are safe enough on that score. He has nothing to tell them that they do not know already. They have got to the bottom of all the mystery, and they don't want him."

"Still it seems to me, Loo, that it might have been safer to keep him along with us—under our eye, as it were."

"Not at all, papa. It is as in a shipwreck, where the plank that will save two will sink with three. The stratagem that will rescue *us* would be probably marred by *him*, and, besides, he'll provide for his own safety better than we should."

Thus talking they entered the little village, where, although

not yet daybreak, a small café was open—one of those humble refreshment-houses frequented by peasants on their way to their daily toil.

"Let us breakfast here," said she, "while they are getting ready some light carriage to carry us on to St. Gall. I have an old friend there, the prior of the monastery, who used to be very desirous to convert me long ago. I intend to give him a week or ten days' trial now, papa; and he may also, if he feel so disposed, experiment upon *you*."

It was in this easy chit-chat they sat down to their coffee in the little inn at Rorschach. They were soon, however, on the road again, seated in a little country carriage drawn by a stout mountain pony.

"Strange enough all this adventure seems," said she, as they ascended the steep mountain on foot, to relieve the weary beast. "Sometimes it appears all like a dream to me, and now, when I look over the lake there, and see the distant spires of Bregenz yonder, I begin to believe that there is reality in it, and that we are acting in a true drama."

Holmes paid but little attention to her words, wrapped up as he was in some details he was reading in a newspaper he had carried away from the café.

"What have you found to interest you so much there, papa?" asked she, at last.

Still he made no reply, but read on.

"It can scarcely be that you are grown a politician again," continued she, laughingly, "and pretend to care for Austria or for Italy."

"This is all about Paten," said he, eagerly. "There's the whole account of it."

"Account of what?" cried she, trying to snatch the paper from him.

"Of his death."

"His death! is he dead? Is Paten dead?" She had to clutch his arm as she spoke to support herself, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that she kept her feet. "How was it? Tell me how he came by his death. Was it O'Shea?"

"No, he was killed. The man who did it has given himself up, alleging that it was in an altercation between them; a pistol, aimed at his own breast, discharged its contents in Paten's."

She tore the paper from his hand, and tottering over to a bank on the roadside, bent down to read it. Holmes continued to talk over the event and all the details, but she did

not hear what he said. She had but senses for the lines she was perusing.

"I thought, at first, it was O'Shea, in some disguise. But it cannot be, for see, they remark here that this man has been observed loitering about Baden ever since Paten arrived. Oh, here's the mystery," cried she. "His name is Collier."

"That was an old debt between them," said Holmes.

"I hope there will be no discovery as to Paten's real name. It would so certainly revive the old scandal."

"We can scarcely expect such good luck as that, Loo. There is but one thing to do, dear; we must put the sea between us and our calumniators."

"How did O'Shea come by the letters if he had no hand in it?"

"Perhaps he had; perhaps it was a concerted thing; perhaps he bought up the letters from Collier afterwards. Is it of the least consequence to us how he got them?"

"Yes, Collier might have read them," said she, in a hollow voice; and as Holmes, startled by the tones, turned round, he saw that she had a sickening faintness over her, and that she trembled violently.

"Where's your old courage, Loo?" said he, cheeringly. "Paten is gone, Collier has a good chance of being sent after him, and here we are, almost the only actors left of the whole drama."

"That's true, papa, very true; and as we shall have to play in the afterpiece, the sooner we get the tragedy out of our heads the better."

They remounted the carriage, and went on their way. There, where the beech-trees bend across the road, it is there they have just disappeared! The brisk tramp of the pony can be heard even yet; it grows fainter and fainter, and only the light train of dust now marks their passage. They are gone —and we are to see them no more!

CHAPTER LVIII.

CONSULTATION.

Every host has had some experience of the fact that there are guests of whom he takes leave at the drawing-room door, and others who require that he should accompany them to the very frontier of his kingdom, and only part with as they step into their carriage. The characters of a story represent each of these classes. Some make their exit quietly, unobtrusively; they slip away with a little gesture of the hand, or a mere look to say adieu. Others arise with a pretentious dignity from their places, and, in the ruffle of their voluminous plumage, seem to say, "When we spread out our wings for flight, the small birds may flutter away to their nests." It is needless that we should tell our readers that we have reached that critical moment. The dull roll of carriages to the door, and the clank of the let-down steps, tell that the hour of departure has arrived, and that the entertainer will very soon be left all alone, without "One of Them."

As in the real world, no greater solecism can be committed than to beg the uprising guest to reseat himself, nor is there any measure more certain of disastrous failure, so in fiction, when there is a move in the company, the sooner they all go the better.

While I am painfully impressed with this fact—while I know and feel that my last words must be very like the leave-takings of that tiresome button-holder who, great-coated and muffled himself, will yet like to detain you in the cold current of a doorway—I am yet sensible of the deference due to those who have indulgently accompanied me through my story, and would desire to leave no questions unanswered with regard to those who have figured before him.

Mr. Trover having overheard the dialogue which had such an intimate bearing on his own fortunes, lost no time, as we have seen, in quitting the hotel at Bregenz; and, although Winthrop expected to see him at dinner, he was not surprised to hear that he had left a message to say he had gone over to the cottage to dine with Mrs. Hawke. It was with an evi-

dent sense of relief that the honest American learned this fact. There was something too repulsive to his nature in the thought of sitting down at the same table in apparent good fellowship with the man whom he knew to be a villain, and whose villany a very few hours would expose to the world; but what was to be done? Quackinboss had insisted on the point; he had made him give a solemn pledge to make no change in his manner towards Trover till such time as the Laytons had returned with full and incontestable proofs of his guilt.

"We'll spoil everything, sir," said Quackinboss, "if we harpoon him in deep water. We must go cautiously to work, and drive him up gradually towards the shallows, where, if one miss, another can strike him."

Winthrop was well pleased to hear that the "chase" was at least deferred, and that he was to dine *téte-à-tête* with his true-hearted countryman.

Hour after hour went over, and in their eager discussion of the complicated intrigue they had unravelled, they lost all recollection of Trover, or his absence. It was the character of the woman which absorbed their entire thoughts; and while Winthrop quoted her letters, so full of beautiful sentiments, so elevated, and so refined, Quackinboss related many little traits of her captivating manner and winning address.

"It's all the same in natur', sir," said he, summing up. "Where will you see prettier berries than on the deadly nightshade? and do you think that they was made to look so temptin' for nothing? or wasn't it jest for a lesson to us to say, 'Be on your guard, stranger; what's good to look at may be mortal bad to feed on.' There's many a warnin' in things that don't talk with our tongues, but have a language of their own."

"Very true all that, sir," resumed the other; "but it was always a puzzle to me why people with such good faculties would make so bad a use of them."

"Ain't it all clear enough they was meant for examples—jest that and no more? You see that clever fellow yonder; he can do fifty things you and I couldn't; he has got brains for this, that, and t'other. Well, if he's a rogue, he won't be satisfied with workin' them brains God has given him, because he has no right sense of thankfulness in his heart, but he'll be counterfitin' all sorts of brains that he hasn't got at all: these are the devil's gifts, and they do the devil's work."

"I know one thing," said Winthrop, doggedly, "it is that sort of folk make the best way in life."

"Clear wrong—all straight on end—unsound doctrine that, sir. We never think of countin' the failures, the chaps that are in gaol, or at the galleys, or maybe hanged. We only take the two or three successful rogues that figure in high places, and we say, 'So much for knavery.' Now let me jest ask you, How did they come there? Wasn't it by pretendin' to be good men? Wasn't it by mock charity, mock patriotism, mock sentiment in fifty ways, supported now and then by a bit of real action, just as a forger always slips a real gold piece amongst his counterfeits? And what is all this but sayin', the way to be prosperous is to be good——"

"Or to seem good!" broke in Winthrop.

"Well, sir, the less we question seemin' the better! I'd rather be taken in every day of the week than I'd go on doubtin' every hour of the day, and I believe one must come very nigh to either at last."

As they thus chatted, a light post-carriage rolled into the inn yard, and Doctor Layton and Alfred hastily got out and made for the apartment of their friends.

"Just as I said—just as I foretold—the certificate forged, without giving themselves the trouble to falsify the register," broke in Layton. "We have seen the book at Meisner, and it records the death of a certain serving woman, Esther Baumhardt, who was buried there seven years ago. All proves that these people, in planning this knavery, calculated on never meeting an opponent."

"Where is this Mr. Trover?" said Alfred. "I thought we should find him here in all the abandonment of friendly ease."

"He dined at the cottage with his other friends," said Winthrop, "for the which I owe him all my gratitude, for I own to you I had sore misgivings about sitting down with him."

"I couldn't have done it," broke in the old Doctor. "My first mouthful would have choked me. As it is, while I wait to denounce his guilt, I have an uneasy sense of complicity, as though I knew of a crime and had not proclaimed it to the world."

"Well, sir," said Quackinboss, and with a sententious slowness, "I ain't minded like either of you. *My* platform is this: Rogues is varmin; they are to the rest of mankind what wolves and hyenas is to the domestic animals. Now, it would not be good policy, or good sport, to pison

these critturs. What they desarve is, to be hunted down! It is a rare stimulus to a fellow's blood to chase a villain. Since I have been on this trail I feel a matter of ten years younger."

"And I am impatient to follow up the chase?" said the Doctor, who, in his eagerness, walked up and down the room with a fretful anxiety.

"Remember," said Alfred, "that however satisfied we ourselves may be on every point of these people's culpability, we have no authority to arrest them, or bring them to justice. We can set the law in motion, but not usurp its action."

"And are they to be let go free?" asked Quackinboss. "Is it when we have run 'em to earth we're to call off the dogs and go home?"

"He's right, though, Colonel," said Winthrop. "Down in our country, mayhap, we'd find half a dozen gentlemen who'd make Mr. Trover's trial a very speedy affair; but here we must follow other fashions."

"Our detective friend says that he'll not leave them till you have received authority from home to demand their extradition," said the Doctor. "I take it for granted forgery is an offence in every land in Europe, and, at all events, no state can have any interest in wishing to screen them."

While they thus talked, Alfred Layton rang the bell, and inquired if Mr. Trover had returned.

The waiter said, "No."

"Why do you ask?" said the Doctor.

"It just occurred to me that he might have seen us as we drove up. He knows the Colonel and myself well."

"And you suspect that he is off, Alfred?"

"It is not so very unlikely."

"Let us down to the cottage, then, and learn this at once," said Quackinboss; "I'd be sore riled if he was to slip his cable, while we thought him hard aground."

"Yes," said the Doctor. "We need not necessarily go and ask for him; Winthrop can just drop in to say a 'good evening,' while we wait outside."

"I wish you had chosen a craftier messenger," said Winthrop, laughing. And now, taking their hats, they set out for the Gebhardts-Berg.

Alfred contrived to slip his arm within that of Quackinboss, and while the others went on in front, he sauntered slowly after with the Colonel. He had been anxiously waiting for a moment when they could talk together, and for

some days back it had not been possible. If the others were entirely absorbed in the pursuit of those who had planned this scheme of fraud, Alfred had but one thought—and that was Clara. It was not as the great heiress he regarded her, not as the owner of a vast property, all at her own disposal; he thought of the sad story that awaited her—the terrible revelation of her father's death—and the scarcely less harrowing history of her who had supplied the place of mother to her. "She will have to learn all this," thought he, "and at the moment that she hears herself called rich and independent, she will have to hear of the open shame and punishment of one who, whatever the relations between them, had called her her child, and assumed to treat her as her own."

To make known all these to Quackinboss, and to induce him, if he could, to regard them in the same light that they appeared to himself, was young Layton's object. Without any preface he told all his fears and anxieties. He pictured the condition of a young girl entering life alone, heralded by a scandal that would soon spread over all Europe. Would not any poverty with obscurity be better than fortune on such conditions? Of what avail could wealth be, when every employment of it would bring up an odious history? and lastly, how reconcile Clara herself to the enjoyment of her good fortune, if it came associated with the bitter memory of others in suffering and in durance? If he knew anything of Clara's heart, he thought that the sorrow would far outweigh the joy the tidings of her changed condition would bring her; at least he hoped that he had so read her nature aright, and it was thus that he had construed it.

If Quackinboss had none of that refined appreciation of sentiment which, in a certain measure, is the conventionality of a class, he had what is infinitely and immeasurably superior, a true-hearted sympathy with everything human. He was sorely sorry for "that widow-woman." He had forgotten none of the charms she threw around their evenings at Marlia long ago, and he was slow to think that these fascinations should always be exercised as snares and deceptions, and, last of all, as he said, "We have never heard *her* story yet—we know nothing of how she has been tried."

"What is it, then, that you propose to do?" asked the Colonel, at the end of a somewhat rambling and confused exposition by young Layton.

"Simply this: abandon all pursuit of these people; spare them and spare ourselves the pain and misery of a public

shame. Their plot has failed; they will never attempt to renew it in any shape; and, above all, let not Clara begin the bright path before her by having to pass through a shadow of suffering and sorrow."

"Ay, there is much in what you say; and now that we have run the game to earth, I have my misgivings that we were not yielding ourselves more to the ardour of the pursuit than stimulated by any love of justice."

While they were thus talking, the others had passed the little wicket and entered the garden of the cottage. Struck by the quietness and the unlighted windows, they knocked hastily at the door. A question and answer revealed all, and the Doctor called out aloud, "They are off! They are away!"

Young Layton pressed Quackinboss's hand, and whispered, "Thank Heaven for it!"

If Winthrop laughed heartily at an escape that struck him as so cleverly effected, the Doctor, far more eager in pursuit than the others, passed into the house to interrogate the people—learn when and how, and in what direction they had fled—and trace, if so it might be, the cause of this sudden departure.

"See," cried he, as the others entered the drawing-room—"see what a sudden retreat it has been! They were at their coffee; here is her shawl, too, just as she may have thrown it off; and here, a heap of papers and letters, half burned, on the hearth."

"One thing is clear enough," said Alfred; "they discovered that they had lost the battle, and they have abandoned the field."

"What do I see here?" cried the doctor, as he picked up a half-burned sheet of paper from the mass. "This is my own writing—my application to the Patent Office, when I was prosecuting my discovery of corrugated steel! When and how could it have come here?"

"Who can 'My dear father' be?" asked Quackinboss, examining a letter which he had lifted from the floor. "Oh, here's his name: 'Captain Nicholas Holmes'——"

"Nick Holmes!" exclaimed the Doctor; "the fellow who stole my invention, and threw me into a madhouse! What of him? Who writes to him as 'dear father'?"

"Our widow, no less," said the Colonel. "It is a few lines to say she is just setting out for Florence, and will be with him within the week."

"And this scoundrel was her father!" muttered the old Doctor. "Only think of all the scores that we should have

had to settle if we had had the luck to be here an hour ago! I thrashed him once in the public streets, it's true, but we are far from being quits yet. Come, let's lose no time, but after them at once."

Alfred made no reply, but turned a look on Quackinboss, as though to bespeak his interference.

"Well, sir," said the Colonel, slowly, "so long as the pursuit involved a something to find out, no man was hotter arter it than I was; but now that we know all, that we have baffled our adversaries and beaten 'em, I ain't a-goin' to distress myself for a mere vengeance."

"Which means that these people are to go at large, free to practise their knaveries on others, and carry into other families the misery we have seen them inflict here. Is that your meaning?" asked the Doctor, angrily.

"I can't tell what they are a-goin' to do hereafter, nor, maybe, can you either, sir. It may be, that with changed hearts they'll try another way of livin'; it may be that they'll see roguery ain't the best thing; it may be—who's to say how?—that all they have gone through of trouble and care and anxiety has made them long since sick of such a wearisome existence, and that, though not very strong in virtue, they are right glad to be out of the pains of vice, whatever and wherever they may be. At all events, Shaver Quackinboss has done with 'em, and if it was only a-goin' the length of the garden to take them this minute, I'd jest say, 'No, tell 'em to slope off, and leave me alone.'"

"Let me tell you, sir, these are not your home maxims, and, for my part, I like Lynch law better than lax justice," said the Doctor, angrily.

"Lynch law has its good and its bad side," said Quackinboss, "and, mayhap, if you come to consider the thing coolly, you'll see that if I was rejecting rigid legality here, it was but to take the benefit of Judge Lynch, only this time for mercy, and not for punishment."

"Ah, there is something in that!" cried the Doctor. "You have made a stronger case for yourself than I looked for; still I owed that fellow a vengeance!"

"It's the only debt a man is dishonoured in the payin', sir. You know far more of life than I do, but did you ever meet the man yet that was sorry for having forgiven an injury? I'm not sayin' that he mightn't have felt disappointed or discouraged by the result—his enemy, as he'd call him, mightn't have turned out what he ought—but that ain't the question: did you ever see one man who could say, after the

lapse of years, 'I wish I had borne more malice—I'm sorry I wasn't more cruel'?"

"Let them go, and let us forget them," said the old man, as he turned and left the room.

Young Layton grasped the Colonel's hand, and shook it warmly, as he said, "This victory is all your own."

CHAPTER LIX.

WORDS OF GOOD CHEER.

When the key-note of some long-sought mystery has sounded there is a strange fascination in going over and over the theme, now wondering why we had not been more struck by this or that fact, how we could have overlooked the importance of this incident or that coincidence. Trivial events come up to memory as missing links in the chain of proof, and small circumstances and chance words are brought up to fill the measure of complete conviction.

It was thus that this party of four sat almost till daybreak talking over the past. Each had some era to speak of as especially his own. Winthrop could tell of Godfrey Hawke when he came a young man to the States, and married his niece, the belle and the heiress of her native city. He remembered all the praises bestowed upon the young Englishman's manners and accomplishments, together with the graver forebodings of others, who had remarked his inordinate love of play and his indifference as to the company in which he indulged it. Next came the Doctor, with his recollections of the man broken down by dissipation and excess, and at last dying of poison. There was but little, indeed, to recall the handsome Godfrey Hawke in the attenuated figure and distorted countenance of that miserable debauchee, but there were chance traits of manner that brought up the man to Winthrop's mind. There were also on the scene his beautiful wife, at that time in the fulness of her beauty. What a charm of gentleness, too, did she possess!—how meekly and patiently did she bear herself under provocations that seemed

too great for human endurance! The Doctor had to own that she actually forfeited some of his sympathy by the impression she gave him of being one deficient in a nice sense of self-esteem, and wanting in that element of resistance without which there is no real dignity of nature. "She seemed to me," said he, "too craven, too abject by half—one of those who are born to be the subject of a tyranny, and who, in their very submission, appear to court the wanton cruelty of an 'oppressor.' How rightly I read her!" cried he; "how truly I deciphered the inscription on her heart! and yet, I'll be sworn, no man living could have detected under that mask of gentleness this woman of long-pondering craft, this deeply-designing plotter!"

"Quackinboss and I saw her under another aspect," said Alfred. "She was depressed and sad, but only so much so as gave an added charm to the grace of her captivations, and made her every effort to please appear somewhat of a sacrifice of herself for those around her."

"Well, ain't it strange, gentlemen," said Quackinboss, "but it's a fact, she never deceived *me?* I remember the day of our visit at Marlia; after that adventure with the dog she fainted, and I took her up in my arms and carried her to the house. I thought, by course, she was insensible. Not a bit of it: she rallied enough to open her eyes, and give me one of the most wonderful looks ever I see in my life. It was just like saying, 'Shaver, are you quite certain that you haven't got in your arms one of the loveliest creatures as ever was formed? Are you sure, Shaver Quackinboss, that you are ever to have such another piece of luck as this?' And so certain was I that I heerd these very words in my ear, that I said aloud, 'Darn me pale blue if I don't wish the house was half a mile away!' And the words wasn't well out than she burst out a-laughin', such a hearty, joyous laugh, too, that I knew in my heart she had neither pain nor ache, and was only a-foxin'. Well, gentlemen, we always had a way of lookin' at each other arter that was quite peculiar; it was sayin', 'Never fear, all's on honour here.' That was, at least, how I meant it, and I have a notion that she understood me as well. I have a strong notion that we understand these women critturs better than you Britishers!"

"You must leave *me* out of the category of the shrewd ones, however," said Winthrop. "I saw her but once in my life, and yet I never came away from a visit with the same amount of favourable impression. She met me like an old friend, but at the same time there was a delicacy and reserve

about her that seemed to say, 'It is for *you* to ratify this compact if you like. When *you* sign the treaty it is finished.'"

From the discussion of the past they proceeded to the future, upon which all felt that Winthrop could speak with most authority, since he was Clara's kinsman and guardian.

"What do you mean to do by the gal, sir?" asked the Colonel.

"I intend to see her as soon as I can, give her the good news of her accession to fortune, and leave her to choose whether she will come back with me to the States, or would prefer that I should remain with her in Europe."

"And ain't there any other alternative possible in the case, sir?" asked Quackinboss. "Doesn't it strike you as just possible that she might say 'No' to each of these proposals, and fix another one for herself?"

"I don't quite understand you, Colonel," said the other.

"I ain't a-goin' to talk riddles, sir. What I mean is, that the young woman may have other thoughts in her head than either of your plans; and now I'll call upon my honor'ble friend, Mr. Alfred Layton, to address the House."

Crimson with shame and confusion, young Layton turned an imploring look at Quackinboss; but the Colonel was indifferent to the appeal, and waved his hand as if bespeaking silence.

"It is rather for me to speak here," said the Doctor. "My son has to begin life with a large arrear of his father's faults to redeem. He has to restore to our name, by conduct and honourable bearing, the fair repute that once attached to it. Honest industry is the safe and sure road to this, and there is no other. He has promised to try and bring back to me in *his* name the suffrages of that university which I forfeited in *mine*. If he succeed, he will have made me proud of him."

"I like that," broke in Quackinboss. "Square it all first with them critturs in the college, and then think of a wife. Go at it, sir, and work like a nigger; there ain't nothing will give you such courage as the very fatigue of a hard day's work. When you lie down at night so dead beat that you couldn't do more, you'll feel that you've earned your rest, and you'll not lie awake with misgivin's and fancies, but you'll sleep with a good conscience, and arise refreshed the next mornin'."

"Alfred and I settled it all between us last night," said the Doctor. "There was but one point we could not arrange to our satisfaction. We are largely indebted to you——"

"Stop her!" cried the Colonel, as though he were giving the word from the paddle-box of a steamer—"stop her! I ain't in a humour to be angry with any one. I feel as how, when the world goes so well as it has done lately with us all, that it would be main ungrateful to show a peevish or discontented spirit, and I don't believe that there's a way to rile me but one—jest one—and you've a-hit on't. Yes, sir, you have!"

Quackinboss began his speech calmly enough, but before he finished it his voice assumed a hard and harsh tone very rare with him.

"Remember, my dear and true-hearted friend," broke in Alfred, "that it's only of one debt we are eager to acquit ourselves. Of all that we owe you in affection and in gratitude, we are satisfied to stand in your books as long as we live."

"I ain't a-goin' to square accounts," said the Colonel; "but if I was, I know well that I'd stand with a long balance agin' me. Meat and drink, sir, is good things, but they ain't as good for a man as liberal thoughts, kind feelin's, and a generous trust in one's neighbour. Well, I've picked up a little of all three from that young man there, and a smatterin' of other things besides that I'd never have larned when barking oak in the bush."

Old Layton shook his head in dissent, and muttered,—

"You may cancel the bond, but we cannot forget the debt."

"Let me arbitrate between you," said Winthrop. "Leave the question at rest till this day twelvemonth. Let each give his word not to approach it, and then time, that will have taught us many a thing in the meanwhile, will supply the best expedient."

They gave their hands to each other in solemn pledge, and not a word was uttered, and the compact was ratified.

"We shall leave this for England to-night," said the Doctor.

"Not, surely, till you come as far as Milan first?" asked Winthrop.

"He's right—he's quite right!" said Quackinboss. "If a man has a Polar voyage afore him, it's no way to harden his constitution by passin' a winter at Palermo. Ain't I right, sir?"

It was not difficult to see that Alfred Layton did not yield a very willing assent to this arrangement, but he stole away from the room unperceived, and carried his sorrow with him to his chamber. He had scarcely closed his door, however when he heard Quackinboss's voice outside.

"I ain't a-comin' to disturb you," said he, entering; "but I have a word or two to say, and, mayhap, can't find another time to say it. You'll be wantin' a trifle or so to begin with before you can turn to earn something for yourself. You'll find it there in that pocket-book—look to it now, sir, I'll have no opposition—it's the best investment ever I had. You'll marry this girl; yes, there ain't a doubt about that, and mayhap, one of these days I'll be a-comin' to you to ask favourable terms for my cousin Obadiah B. Quackinboss, that's located down there in your own diggin's, and you'll say, 'Well, Colonel, I ain't forgotten old times; we was thick as thieves once on a time, and so fix it all your own way.'"

Alfred could but squeeze the other's hand as he turned away, his heart too full for him to speak.

"I like your father, sir," resumed Quackinboss, "he's a grand fellow, and if it warn't for some of his prejudices about the States, I'd say I never met a finer man."

Young Layton saw well how by this digression the American was adroitly endeavouring to draw the conversation into another direction, and one less pregnant with exciting emotions.

"Yes, sir, he ain't fair to us," resumed the Colonel. "He forgets that we're a new people, and jest as hard at work to build up our new civilization as our new cities."

"There's one thing he never does, never can forget: that the warmest, fastest friend his son ever met with in life came from your country."

"Well, sir, if there be anything we Yankees are famed for it is the beneficial employment of our spare capital. We don't sit down content with three-and-a-half or four per cent. interest, like you Britishers, we look upon *that* as a downright waste; and it's jest the same with our feelin's as our dollars, though *you* of the old country don't think so. We can't afford to wait thirty, or five-and-thirty years for a friendship. We want lively sales, sir, and quick returns. We want to know if a man mean kindly by us afore we've both of us got too old to care for it. That's how I come to like you first, and I warn't so far out in thinkin' that I'd made a good investment."

Alfred could only smile good-humouredly at the speech, and the other went on,—

"You Britishers begin by givin' us Yankees certain national traits and habits, and you won't let us be anything but what you have already fashioned us in your own minds. But, arter all, I'd have you to remember we are far more

like your people of a century back than you yourselves are. We ain't as mealy-mouthed, and as p'lite, and as smooth-tongued as the moderns. But if we're plain of speech, we are simple of habit; and what you so often set down as rudeness in us ain't anything more than our wish to declare that we ain't in want of any one's help or assistance, but we are able to shift for ourselves, and are independent."

Quackinboss arose, as he said this, with the air of a man who had discharged his conscience of a load. He had often smarted under what he felt to be the unfair appreciation of the old Doctor for America, and he thought that by instilling sounder principles into his son's mind, the seed would one day or other produce good fruit.

From this he led Alfred to talk of his plans for the future. It was his father's earnest desire that he should seek collegiate honours in the university which had once repudiated himself. The old man did not altogether arraign the justice of the act, but he longed to see his name once more in a place of honour, and that the traditions of his own triumphs should be renewed in his son's.

"If I succeed," said Alfred, "it will be time enough afterwards to say what next."

"You'll marry that gal, sir, and come out to the States. I see it all as if I read it in a book."

Alfred shook his head doubtfully, and was silent.

"Well, I'm a-goin' to Milan with Harvey Winthrop, and when I see the country, as we say, I'll tell you about the clearin'."

"You'll write to me, too?"

"That I will. It may be that she won't have outright forgotten me, and if so, she'll be more friendly with me than an uncle she has never seen nor known about. I'll soon find out if her head's turned by all this good luck, or if, as I hope, the fortune has fallen on one as deserved it. Mayhap she'll be for goin' over to America at once, mayhap she'll have a turn for doing it grand here, in Europe. Harvey Winthrop says she'll have money enough to buy up one of these little German states, and be a Princess if she likes; at all events you shall hear, and then in about a month hence look out for me some fine evening, for I tell you, sir, I've got so used to it now, that I can't get through the day without a talk with you; and though the Doctor and I do have a bout now and then over the Yankees, I'd like to see the man who'd abuse America before him, and say one word against England in the face of Shaver Quackinboss."

CHAPTER LX.

THE LETTER FROM ALFRED LAYTON.

When Sir William Heathcote learned that Mrs. Morris had quitted his house, gone without one word of adieu, his mind reverted to all the bygone differences with his son, and to Charles did he at once ascribe the cause of her sudden flight. His health was in that state in which agitation becomes a serious complication, and for several days he was dangerously ill, violent paroxysms of passion alternating with long intervals of apathy and unconsciousness. The very sight of Charles in his room would immediately bring on one of his attacks of excitement, and even the presence of May Leslie herself brought him no alleviation of suffering. It was in vain that she assured him that Mrs. Morris left on reasons known only to herself, that even to May herself she had explained nothing, written nothing. The old man obstinately repeated his conviction that she had been made the victim of an intrigue, and that Charles was at the bottom of it. How poor May strove to combat this unjust and unworthy suspicion, how eagerly she defended him she loved, and how much the more she learned to love for the defending of him. Charles, too, in this painful emergency, displayed a moderation and self-control for which May had never given him credit. Not a hasty word or impatient expression escaped him, and he was unceasing in every attention to his father, which he could render without the old man's knowledge. It was a very sad household; on every side there was sickness and sorrow, but few of those consolations that alleviate pain or lighten suffering. Sir William desired to be left almost always alone, Charles walked moodily by himself in the garden, and May kept her room, and seldom left it. Lord Agincourt came daily to ask after them, but could see no one. Even Charles avoided meeting him, and merely sent him a verbal message, or a few hasty lines with a pencil.

Upwards of a week had passed in this manner, when, among the letters from the post, which Charles usually opened and only half read through, came a very long epistle from Alfred Layton. His name was on the corner of the

envelope, and, seeing it, Charles tossed the letter carelessly across the table to May, saying, in a peevish irony, "You may care to see what your old admirer has to say; as for me, I have no such curiosity."

She paid no attention to the rude speech, and went on with her breakfast.

"You don't mean to say," cried he, in the same pettish tone, "that you don't care what there may be in that letter? It may have some great piece of good fortune to announce. He may have become a celebrity, a rich man—Heaven knows what. This may contain the offer of his hand. Come, May, don't despise destiny; break the seal and read your fate."

She made no answer, but, rising from the table, left the room.

It was one of those days on which young Heathcote's temper so completely mastered him, that in anger with himself he would quarrel with his dearest friend. Fortunately, they were now very rare with him, but when they did come he was their slave. When on service and in the field these were the intervals in which his intrepid bravery, stimulated to very madness, had won him fame and honour; and none, not even himself, knew that some of his most splendid successes were reckless indifference to life. His friends, however, learned to remark that Heathcote was no companion at such times, and they usually avoided him.

He sat on at the breakfast-table, not eating, or indeed well conscious where he was, when the door was hastily thrown open, and Agincourt entered. "Well, old fellow," cried he, "I have unearthed you at last. Your servants have most nobly resisted all my attempts to force a passage, or bribe my way to you, and it was only by a stratagem that I contrived to slip past the porter, and pass in."

"You have cost the fellow his place, then," said Charles, rudely; "he shall be sent away to-day."

"Nonsense, Charley; none of this moroseness with me."

"And why not with *you?*" cried the other, violently. "Why not with *you?* You'll not presume to say that the accident of your station gives you the privilege of intruding where others are denied? You'll not pretend that?"

A deep flush covered the young man's face, and his eyes flashed angrily, but just as quickly a softened expression came over his countenance, and in a voice of mingled kindness and bantering, he said, "I'll tell you what I'll pretend, Charley; I'll pretend to say that you love me too sincerely

to mean to offend me, even when a harsh speech has escaped you in a moment of haste or anger."

"Offend you!" exclaimed Heathcote, with the air of a man utterly puzzled and confused—"offend you! How could I dream of offending you? You were not used to be touchy, Agincourt—what, in the name of wonder, could make you fancy I meant offence?"

The look of his face, the very accent in which he spoke, were so unaffectedly honest and sincere, that the youth saw at once how unconsciously his rude speech had escaped him, and that not a trace of it remained in his memory.

"I have been so anxious to see you, Charley," said he, in his usual tone, "for some days back. I wanted to consult you about O'Shea. My uncle has given me an appointment for him, and I can't find out where he is. Then there's another thing; that strange Yankee, Quackinboss—you remember him at Marlia, long ago. He found out, by some means, that I was at the hotel here, and he writes to beg I'll engage I can't say how many rooms for himself and some friends who are to arrive this evening. I don't think you are listening to me, are you?"

"Yes, I hear you—go on."

"I mean to clear out of the diggin's if these Yankees come, and you must tell me where to go. I don't dislike the 'Kernal,' but his following would be awful, eh?"

"Yes, quite so."

"What do you mean by 'Yes'? Is it that you agree with me, or that you haven't paid the slightest attention to one word I've said?"

"Look here, Agincourt," said Charley, passing his arm inside the other's, and leading him up and down the room. "I wish I had not changed my mind; I wish I had gone to India. I have utterly failed in all that I hoped to have done here, and I have made my poor father more unhappy than ever."

"Is he so determined to marry this widow, then?"

"She is gone. She left us more than a week ago, without saying why or for whither. I have not the slightest clue to her conduct, nor can I guess where she is."

"When was it she left this?"

"On Wednesday week last."

"The very day O'Shea started."

They each looked steadfastly at the other; and at last Agincourt said,—

"Wouldn't that be a strange solution of the riddle, Charley?

On the last night we dined together you may remember I promised to try what I could make of the negotiation, and so I praised the widow, extolled her beauty, and hinted that she was exactly the clever sort of woman that helps a man on to fortune."

"How I wish I had gone to India!" muttered Charles, and so immersed in his own cares as not to hear one word the other was saying.

"If I were to talk in that way, Charley, you'd be the very first to call out—What selfishness! what an utter indifference to all feelings but your own! You are merely dealing with certain points that affect yourself, and you forget a girl that loves you."

"Am I so sure of that? Am I quite certain that an old attachment—she owned to me herself that she liked him, that tutor fellow of yours—has not a stronger hold on her heart than I have? There's a letter from him. I haven't opened it. I have a sort of half suspicion that when I do read it I'll have a violent desire to shoot him. It is just as if I knew that, inside that packet there, was an insult awaiting me, and yet I'd like to spare myself the anger it will cause me when I break the seal; and so I walk round the table and look at the letter, and turn it over, and at last——" With the word he tore open the envelope, and unfolded the note. "Has he not given me enough of it? One, two, three, ay, four pages! When a man writes at such length, he is certain to be either very tiresome or very disagreeable, not to say that I never cared much for your friend Mr. Layton; he gave himself airs with us poor unlettered folk——"

"Come, come, Charley; if you were not in an ill mood you'd never say anything so ungenerous."

It was possible that he felt the rebuke to be just, for he did not reply, but seating himself in the window, began to read the letter. More than once did Agincourt make some remark, or ask some question. Of even his movements of impatience Heathcote took no note, as, deeply immersed in the contents of the letter, he continued to read on.

"Well, I'll leave you for a while, Charley," said he, at last; "perhaps I may drop in to see you this evening."

"Wait; stay where you are," cried Heathcote, abruptly, and yet not lifting his eyes from the lines before him. "What a story!—what a terrible story!" muttered he to himself. Then beckoning to Agincourt to come near, he caught him by the arm, and in a low whisper said, "Who do you think she turns out to be? The widow of Godfrey Hawke!"

"I never so much as heard of Godfrey Hawke."

"Oh, I forgot; you were an infant at the time. But surely you must have heard or read of that murder at Jersey?—a well-known gambler, named Hawke, poisoned by his associates, while on a visit at his house."

"And who is she?"

"Mrs. Penthony Morris. Here's the whole story. But begin at the beginning."

Seated side by side, they now proceeded to read the letter over together, nor did either speak a word till it was finished.

"And to be so jolly with all that on her mind!" exclaimed Agincourt. "Why, she must have the courage of half a dozen men."

"I now begin to read the meaning of many things I never could make out: her love of retirement—she, a woman essentially of the world and society, estranging herself from every one; her strange relations with Clara, a thing which used to puzzle me beyond measure; and lastly, her remarkable injunction to me when we parted, her prayer to be forgotten, or, at least, never mentioned."

"You did not tell me of that."

"Nor was it my intention to have done so now; it escaped me involuntarily."

"And what is to become of Clara?"

"Don't you see that she has found an uncle—this Mr. Winthrop—with whom, and our friend Quackinboss, she is to arrive at Rome to-night or to-morrow?"

"Oh, these are the friends for whom I was to bespeak an apartment, so then I'll not leave my hotel. I'm delighted to have such neighbours."

"May ought to go and meet her—she ought to bring her here; and of course she will do so. But, first of all, to show her this letter; or shall I merely tell her certain parts of it?"

"I'd let her read every line of it, and I'd give it to Sir William also."

Charles started at the counsel; but after a moment he said, "I believe you are right. The sooner we clear away these mysteries, the sooner we shall deal frankly together."

"I have come to beg your pardon, May," said Charles, as he stood on the sill of her door. "I could scarcely hope you'd grant it save from very pity for me, for I have gone through much this last day or two. But, besides your pardon, I want your advice. When you have read over that letter—read it twice—I'll come back again."

May made him no answer, but, taking the letter, turned

away. He closed the door noiselessly, and left her. Whatever may be the shock a man experiences on learning that the individual with whom for a space of time he has been associating on terms of easy intimacy should turn out to be one notorious in crime or infamous in character, to a woman the revulsion of feeling under like circumstances is tenfold more painful. It is not alone that such casualties are so much more rare, but in the confidences between women there is so much more interchange of thought and feeling that the shock is proportionately greater. That a man should be arraigned before a tribunal is a stain, but to a woman it is a brand burnt upon her for ever.

There had been a time when May and Mrs. Morris lived together as sisters. May had felt all the influence of a character more formed than her own, and of one who, gifted and accomplished as she was, knew how to extend that influence with consummate craft. In those long ago days May had confided to her every secret of her heart. Her early discontents with Charles Heathcote, her pettish misgivings about the easy confidence of his security, her half flirtation with young Layton, daily inclining towards something more serious still. She recalled to mind, too, how Mrs. Morris had encouraged her irritation against Charles, magnifying all his failings into faults, and exaggerating the natural indolence of his nature into the studied indifference of one "sure of his bond." And last of all she thought of her in her relations with Clara; poor Clara, whose heart, overflowing with affection, had been repelled and schooled into a mere mockery of sentiment.

That her own fortune had been wasted and dissipated by this woman she well knew. Without hesitation or inquiry, May had signed everything that was put before her, and now she really could not tell what remained to her of all that wealth of which she used to hear so much and care so little.

These thoughts tracked her along every line of the letter, and through all the terrible details she was reading; the woman herself, in her craft and subtlety, absorbed her entire attention. Even when she had read to the end, and learned the tidings of Clara's fortune, her mind would involuntarily turn back to Mrs. Penthony Morris and her wiles. It was in an actual terror at the picture her mind had drawn of this deep designing woman that Charles found her sitting with the letter before her, and her eyes staring wildly and on vacancy.

"I see, May," said he, gently taking her hand, and seating

himself at her side, "this dreadful letter has shocked *you*, as it has shocked *me;* but remember, dearest, we are only looking back at a peril we have all escaped. She has *not* separated us—she has not involved us in the disgrace of relationship to her—she is not one of us—she is not anything even to poor Clara; and though we may feel how narrowly we have avoided all our dangers, let us be grateful for that safety for which we really contributed nothing ourselves. Is it not so, dearest May? We have gained the harbour, and never knew that we had crossed a quicksand."

"And, after all, Charles, painful as all this is now, and must be when remembered hereafter, it is not without its good side. We will all draw closer to each other, and love more fondly where we can trust implicitly."

"And you forgive me, May?"

"Certainly not—if you assume forgiveness in that fashion!"

Now, though this true history records that May Leslie arose with a deep flush upon her cheek, and her massy roll of glossy hair somewhat dishevelled, there is no mention of what the precise fashion was in which Charles Heathcote sued out his pardon; nor, indeed, with our own narrow experiences of such incidents, do we care to hazard a conjecture.

"And now as to my father, May. How much of this letter shall we tell him?"

"All; every word of it. It will pain him, as it has pained us, or even more; but, that pain once over, he will come back, without one reserved thought, to all his old affection for us, and we shall be happy as we used to be."

CHAPTER LXI.

AN EAGER GUEST.

When Lord Agincourt returned to his hotel, he was astonished to see waiters passing in and out of his apartment with trays covered with dishes, decanters of wine, and plates of fruit, but as he caught the deep tone of O'Shea's voice from within, he quickly understood how that free-and-easy personage was making himself at home.

"Oh, it is here you are!" said Agincourt, entering; "and Charley and I have been just speculating whether you might not have been expiating some of your transgressions in an Austrian gaol."

"I am here, as you perceive," said the O'Shea, wiping his lips with his napkin, "and doing indifferently well, too. By the way they treat me, I'm given to believe that your credit stands well with the hotel people."

"When did you arrive?"

"An hour ago; just in time to make them roast that hedgehog. They call it a sucking-pig, but I know it's a hedgehog, though I was eight-and-forty hours without eating."

"How was that?"

"This way," said he, as he drew out the lining of his pockets, and showed that they were perfectly empty. "I just left myself enough for the diligence fare from Bologna, and one roll of bread and a pint of wine as I started; since that I have tasted nothing but the pleasures of hope. Don't talk to me, therefore, or talk away, but don't expect me to answer you for fifteen minutes more."

Agincourt nodded, and seated himself at the table, in quiet contemplation of the O'Shea's performance. "I got an answer to my letter about you," said he, at length, and rather curious to watch the struggle between his hunger and his curiosity.

O'Shea gave a nod, as though to say "Proceed;" but Agincourt said nothing.

"Well, go on!" cried O'Shea, as he helped himself to half a duck.

"It's a long-winded sort of epistle," said Agincourt, now determined to try his patience to the uttermost. "I'll have to show it to you."

"Is it Yes or No?" asked O'Shea, eagerly, and almost choking himself with the effort to speak.

"That's pretty much how you take it. You see, my uncle is one of those formal old fellows trained in official life, and who have a horror of doing anything against the traditions of a department——"

"Well, well, well! but can't he say whether he'll give me something or not?"

"So he does say it, but you interrupt me at every moment. When you have read through his letter, you'll be able to appreciate the difficulties of his position, and also decide on what you think most conducive to your own interests."

O'Shea groaned heavily, as he placed the remainder of the duck on his plate.

"What of your duel? How did it go off?"

"Beautifully."

"Did your man behave well?"

"Beautifully."

"Was he hit?"

A shake of the head.

"Was the Frenchman wounded?"

"Here—flesh wound—nothing serious."

"That's all right. I'll leave you now, to finish your lunch in quiet. You'll find me on the Pincian when you stroll out."

"Look here! Don't go! Wait a bit! I want you to tell me in one word—can I get anything or not?"

The intense earnestness of his face as he spoke would have made any further tantalizing such a cruelty that Agincourt answered frankly, "Yes, old fellow, they've made you a Boundary Commissioner; I forget where, but you're to have a thousand a year, and some allowances besides."

"This isn't a joke? You're telling me truth?" asked he, trembling all over with anxiety.

"On honour," said Agincourt, giving his hand.

"You're a trump, then; upon my conscience, you're a trump. Here I am now, close upon eight-and-thirty—I don't look it by five years, but I am—and after sitting for four sessions in Parliament, not a man did I ever find would do me a hand's turn, but it's to a brat of a boy I owe the

only bit of good fortune of my whole life. That's what I call hard—very hard."

"I don't perceive that it's very complimentary to myself, either," said Agincourt, struggling to keep down a laugh. But O'Shea was far too full of his own cares to have any thought for another's, and he went on muttering below his breath about national injustice and Saxon jealousy.

"You'll accept this, then? Shall I say so?"

"I believe you will! I'd like to see myself refuse a thousand a year and pickings."

"I suspect I know what you have in your mind, too. I'll wager a pony that I guess it. You're planning to marry that pretty widow, and carry her out with you."

O'Shea grew crimson over face and forehead, and stared at the other almost defiantly, without speaking.

"Ain't I right?" asked Agincourt, somewhat disconcerted by the look that was bent upon him.

"You are not right; you were never more wrong in your life."

"May be so, but you'll find it a hard task to persuade me so."

"I don't want to persuade you of anything; but this I know, that you've started a subject there that I won't talk on with you or any one else. Do you mind me now? I'm willing enough to owe you the berth you offered me, but not upon conditions; do you perceive—no conditions."

This was not a very intelligible speech, but Agincourt could detect the drift of the speaker, and caught him cordially by the hand, and said, "If I ever utter a word that offends you, I pledge my honour it will be through inadvertence, and not intention."

"That will do. I'm your debtor now, and without misgivings. I want to see young Heathcote as soon as I can. Would I find him at home now?"

"I'll get him over here to dine with us. We'll have a jolly evening together, and drink a boundless success to the Boundary Commissioner. If I don't mistake, too, there's another good fellow here would like to be one of us."

"Another! who can he be?"

"Here he comes to answer for himself." And, as he spoke, Quackinboss lounged into the room, with his hands deep in his trousers-pockets, and his hat on his head.

"Well, sir, I hope I see you in good health," said he to Agincourt. "You've grown a bit since we met last, and you ain't so washy-lookin' as you used to be."

"Thanks. I'm all right in health, and very glad to see you, besides. Is not my friend here an old acquaintance of yours—the O'Shea?"

"The O'Shea," said Quackinboss, slowly, laying great stress upon the definite article.

"The O'Shea! Yes, sir."

"You may remember that we met at Lucca some time back," said O'Shea, who felt that the moment was embarrassing and unpleasant.

"Yes, sir. 'The Shaver' recollects you," said he, in a slow, drawling tone, "and, if I ain't mortal mistaken, there's a little matter of account unsettled between us."

"I'm not aware of any dealings between us," said O'Shea, haughtily.

"Well, sir, *I* am, and that comes pretty much to the same thing. You came over to Lucca one day to see young Layton, and you saw me, and we had a talk together about miscellaneous matters, and we didn't quite agree, and we parted with the understandin' that we'd go over the figures again, and make the total all right. I hope, sir, you are with me in all this?"

"Perfectly. I remember it all now. I went over to settle a difference I had had with Layton, and you, with that amiable readiness for a fight that distinguishes your countrymen, proposed a little row on your own account; something—I forget what it was now—interfered with each of us at the time, but we agreed to let it stand over and open for a future ocasion."

"You talk like a printed book, sir. It's a downright treat to hear you. Go on," said the Colonel, seriously.

"It's my turn now," broke in Agincourt, warmly, "and I must say, I expected both more good sense and more generosity from either of you than to make the first moment of a friendly meeting the occasion of remembering an old grudge. You'll not leave this room till you have shaken hands, and become—what you are well capable of being—good friends to each other."

"I have no grudge against the Colonel," said O'Shea, frankly.

"Well, sir," said Quackinboss, slowly, "I'm thinkin' Mr. Agincourt is right. As John Randolf of Roanoke said, 'The men who are ready to settle matters with the pistol, are seldom slow to set them right on persuasion.' Here's my hand, sir."

"You'll both dine with me to-day, I hope," said Agincourt.

"My friend here," added he, taking O'Shea's arm, "has just received a Government appointment, and we are bound to 'wet his commission' for him in some good claret."

They accepted the hospitable proposal readily, and now, at perfect ease together, and without one embarrassing thought to disturb their intercourse, they sat chatting away pleasantly for some time, when suddenly Quackinboss started up, saying, "Darn me a pale pink, if I haven't forgot all that I came about. Here's how it was." And, as he spoke, he took Agincourt to one side and whispered eagerly in his ear.

"But they know it all, my dear Colonel," broke in Agincourt. "Charles Heathcote has had the whole story in a long letter from Layton. I was with him this morning when the post arrived, and I read the letter myself; and, so far from entertaining any of the doubts you fear, they are only impatient to see dear Clara once more and make her 'One of Them.'"

"Well, sir, I'm proud to know it," said the Colonel, "not only because it was my own readin' of 'em, but whenever I hear anything good or generous, I feel as if—bein' a human crittur myself—I came in for some of the credit of it. The doubt was never mine, sir. It was my friend, Mr. Harvey Winthrop, that thought how, perhaps, there might be a scruple, or a hesitation, or a sort of backwardness about knowin' a gal with such a dreadful story tacked to her. 'In Eu-rōpe, sir,' says he, 'they won't have them sort of things; they ain't like our people, who are noways displeased at a bit of notoriety.'"

"There!—look there!—the whole question is decided already," said Agincourt, as he drew the other towards the window and pointed to the street below. "There go the two girls together; they have driven off in that carriage, and Clara has her home once more in the midst of those who love her."

"I'm bound to say, sir," said Quackinboss, after a moment's pause, "that you Britishers are a fine people. You have, it is true, too many class distinctions and grades of rank among you, but you have a main hearty sympathy that teaches you to deal with human sufferin' as a thing that makes all men kindred; and whenever it's your lot to have to do a kindness, you double the benefit by the delicacy you throw into it."

"That's a real good fellow," said O'Shea, as Quackinboss quitted the room.

"Is he not?" cried Agincourt. "If I ever harbour an ungenerous thought about Yankees, I know how to correct it, by remembering that he's 'One of Them.'"

CHAPTER LXII.

CONCLUSION.

Most valued reader, can you number amongst your life experiences that very suggestive one of revisiting some spot where you had once sojourned pleasantly, with scarcely any of the surroundings which first embellished it? With all the instruction and self-knowledge derivable from such an incident, there is a considerable leaven of sorrow, and even some bitterness. It is so very hard to believe that we are ourselves more changed than all around. We could have sworn that waterfall was twice as high, and certainly the lake used not to be the mere pond we see it; and the cedars—surely these are not the cedars we were wont to sit under with Marian long ago? Oh dear! when I think that I once fancied I could pass my life in this spot, and now I am actually impatient for day-dawn that I may leave it!

With something of this humour three persons sat at sunset under the old beech-trees at the Bagni di Lucca. They were characters in this true history that we but passingly presented to our reader, and may well have lapsed from his memory. They were Mr. and Mrs. Morgan and Mr. Mosely, who had, by the merest accident, once more met and renewed acquaintance.

"My wife remembered you, sir, the moment you entered the table-d'hôte room. She said, 'There's that young man of Trip and Mosely's, that we saw here—was it three years ago?"

"Possibly," was the dry response. "*My* memory is scarcely so good."

"You know I never forget a face, Tom," broke in the lady.

"I constantly do," said Mosely, tartly.

"Yes, but you must see so many people every day of your life, such hordes passing in and passing out, as I said to Morgan, it's no wonder at all if he can't remember us."

Mr. Mosely had just burnt his finger with a lucifer-match, and muttered something not actually a benediction.

"Great changes over Italy—indeed, over all Europe—since we met last here," said Morgan, anxious to get discussion into a safer region.

"Yes, the Italians are behaving admirably; they've shown the world that they are fully capable of winning their liberty, and knowing how to employ it."

"Don't believe it, sir—bigoted set of rascals—it's all pillage—simple truth is, the Governments were all too good for them."

"You're right, Tom; perfectly right."

"He'll not have many to agree with him, then; of that, madam, be well assured. The sympathies of the whole world are with these people."

"Sympathies!—I like to hear of sympathies! Why won't sympathies mend the holes in their pantaloons, sir, and give them bread to eat?"

Mosely arose with impatience, and began to draw on his gloves.

"Oh, don't go for a moment, sir," broke in the lady. "I am so curious to hear if you know what became of the people we met the last time we were here?"

"Which of them?"

"Well—indeed, *I*'d like to hear about all of them."

"I believe I can tell you, then. The Heathcotes are living in Germany. The young man is married to Miss Leslie, but no great catch either, for she lost about two-thirds of her fortune in speculation; still, they've got a fine place on the Elbe, near Dresden, and I saw them at the Opera there a few nights ago."

"And that young fellow—Layton, or Leighton——"

"Layton. He made a good thing of it. He married the girl they called Miss Hawke, with a stunning fortune; their yacht is waiting for them now at Leghorn. They say he's the first astronomer of the day. I can only tell you, that if his wife be like her picture in this year's Exhibition, she's the handsomest woman in England. I heard it all from Colonel Quackinboss."

"And so you met Quackinboss?"

"Yes, he came out from England in Layton's schooner, and is now gone down to join Garibaldi. He says 'Come si fa?' isn't such a poor devil as he once thought him, and if they do determine to strike a blow for freedom, an American ought to be 'ONE OF THEM.'"

THE END.

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